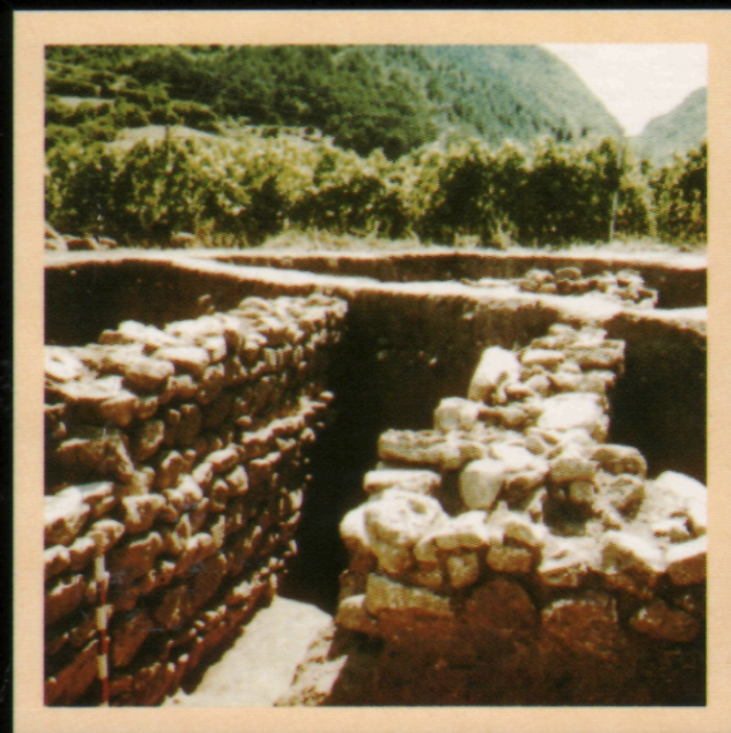


ROAD EXECUTIVE AGENCY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES



KOPRIVLEN

VOLUME 1

ROAD EXECUTIVE AGENCY
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE, BULGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

KOPRIVLEN

volume 1

**Rescue Archaeological Investigations
along the Gotse Delchev – Drama Road
1998 – 1999**

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Sofia 2002



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Ivanov, R. Kolev, E. Krondeva, L. Petrova, N. Tonkov (illustrations)

ISBN 954-90387-7-7

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[http://www.techno-link.com/clients/lvagalin/index.html\(ArchBul\)](http://www.techno-link.com/clients/lvagalin/index.html(ArchBul))

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PREFACE

In the few years that have elapsed since its first discovery in 1995, the archaeological site at Koprivlen near Gotse Delchev in south-western Bulgaria has come to be treated as one of those ancient inhabited places which serve as points of reference in the scientific investigation of the past. The extreme habitational continuity (from the Late Bronze Age till the Middle Ages) and the character of the cultural remains from all relevant periods have indisputably established the high scientific value of the site. The field investigations in the vicinity of the modern village of Koprivlen have passed through stages of different duration and intensity. The most extensive and efficient archaeological excavations in 1998 and 1999 were imposed by the imminent construction of a section of the international road between Gotse Delchev and Drama. The prompt initiation and ready financing of these excavations by the *Road Executive Agency* not only fulfilled the exigencies of the law but also provided an example of a responsible attitude to the preservation of the cultural heritage in line with the high standards of world practice.

The present publication was realized with the benevolent assistance of the management of the *Roads Executive Agency* and completes a successful stage in the archaeological investigations at Koprivlen, introducing the results of the excavations in 1998 and 1999 with their various aspects and issues.

As the partner of the *Roads Executive Agency* in the realization of this project, the *Archaeological Institute and Museum* at the *Bulgarian Academy of Sciences* has strictly kept its obligations for the expedient and efficient execution of the archaeological excavations in 1998 and 1999 and of the necessary specialized interventions during the actual construction of the road section in 2000 and 2001.

The cooperation between the two institutions has demonstrated how goodwill and shared responsibility can find the common means for the preservation of the cultural and historical heritage in the implementation of large-scale infrastructural projects.

Sofia, 2002

Prof. Y. Yurukova, Dr Sc.
Director
Archaeological Institute and Museum
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

I. A HISTORY OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION AT KOPRIVLEN

Anelia Bozkova

(Institute of Archaeology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)

The archaeological site situated in the vicinity of the modern village of Koprivlen has come to light quite recently. Fragmentary references were actually mentioned in some earlier general surveys, but only in connection with isolated chance finds or reiterating the general indication about the presence of archaeological materials in the area.¹

The site was first registered in 1995 during a campaign of field surveying carried out under a project for archaeological investigations in the Nevrokop Valley, sponsored by the then *National Fund for Scientific Investigation* at the *Ministry of Education, Science and Technology* and directed by the *Institute of Archaeology* at the *Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*. The implementation of this three-year investigation project provided the team with the opportunity not only to identify the cultural remains in the locality Kozluka (Bryasta) near the modern village of Koprivlen, but also, between 1995 and 1997, to carry out the first trial excavations there. Two of the initial trial pits, designated as *Sondage 1* and *Sondage 4*, provided substantial stratigraphic data about the development of the site in the 1st millennium B.C. The results from the first campaign in 1995 were enough to procure a preliminary declaration of the site as a *Monument of Culture* with provisional “national importance” category. At present, the procedure of granting the site a permanent status of *Monument of Culture of National Importance* is in progress.

In 1995-1997, along with the excavations at Koprivlen, the archaeological team made intensive field surveys in the region west of the Mesta, between Gotse Delchev and the state border. The participation of students in the team was sponsored by the *Open Society Foundation*. In several successive campaigns these surveys covered considerable territories around the villages Musomishte, Lyaski, Koprivlen, Sadovo, Petrelik, Ilinden, Teplen and Beslen and the town of Hadjidimovo. Dozens of archaeological sites from different periods were registered, permitting the establishment of a large database of reliable scientific information on the character and development of the regional settlement system in antiquity and its various components – settlements, necropolises, sanctuaries, industrial sites (metallurgical centres), etc. Interesting observations were also made on the ancient road network in the area. The archaeological finds from the field surveys have added to the understanding of the regional cultural characteristics during several historical periods.

During the implementation of the project sponsored by the *National Fund for Scientific Investigation* the archaeological team undertook also trial excavations at a burial mound situated near the Monastery of St. George by Hadjidimovo. The excavations were incited by the information of a stone tomb discovered and damaged in the thirties by local people.² They resulted in the discovery of the antechamber of a hypogeum stone tomb built of ashlar blocks. The vault was completely destroyed. The antechamber was of rectangular form, with an entrance to the southeast. The façade preserved traces of red and white coloured plaster. The insufficient financial provision prevented the complete study of the tomb, which was re-buried at the end of the campaign.

A couple of ritual pits were studied under the tumulus and beneath the ancient ground level; these contained archaeological materials resembling those from *phase I* of the site at Koprivlen.³ The most eloquent finds were the fragments of wheel-made vessels decorated with geometric motifs.

Although very restrained, the excavations at the tumulus by Hadjidimovo provided valuable evidence about the ancient Thracian culture in the region. The examination of the pottery gathered

¹ Gergova 1987: 33; Domaradzki 1990: 31; Gergova 1995: 33, Fig. 1; Encyclopaedia 1995: 454-455.

² Mikov 1937: 212; Mikov 1957: 221

³ Cf. *Chapter III.1* infra.

from the surface in the same vicinity authorizes the preliminary localisation of another large and probably significant settlement of the same period as the one near Koprivlen. The tomb which is typologically related to the so-called *Macedonian tombs* is the first of its kind to be studied in South-Western Bulgaria. It sheds new light on the political history and cultural affinities of the Thracian tribes in the region during the early Hellenistic Period.

The results of the field surveys carried out in 1995-1997 under the project sponsored by the *National Fund for Scientific Investigation* could be estimated as highly satisfactory. They permitted the elaboration of a precise and comprehensive archaeological map of a region previously very imperfectly studied, and this newly acquired knowledge about the whole territory gave the research team the particular chance to situate the site by Koprivlen against its genuine cultural and geographical background.

The archaeological exploration of the site by the village of Koprivlen was continued in 1998 and 1999 with the rescue excavations imposed by the impending construction of a section of the road between Gotse-Delchev and the state frontier (*Fig. 1*). The excavations were financed by the *General Road Administration* under a contract with the *Institute of Archaeology*. They were carried out by the same team which had begun the exploration of the site in the previous years and continued actively for some ten months. The large scale of the excavations and the presence of structures from different archaeological periods imposed an enlargement of the archaeological team, which included members from several different institutions – the Institute of Archaeology, the “St Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia, the historical museums in Samokov and Blagoevgrad.

The rescue excavations were restricted in the outline of the roadbed, which bypasses the modern village, crossing through the territory of the archaeological site. The field observations and the trial pits excavated along the roadbed helped to identify from the very start of the campaign the several sectors containing archaeological structures (*Fig. 2*). The preliminary ideas on the chronological limits of the site were changed considerably in the process of the excavation of these sectors with the addition of substantial archaeological structures of the Late Bronze Age, Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. In the area provisionally described as *Sector “North”*, a Thracian ritual complex of the 7th-4th c. B.C. had been succeeded by a necropolis of Late Antique and Early Medieval date (*Colour Plates, Fig. 283*). The excavations in *Sector “Centre”* brought to light cultural layers of the 1st millennium B.C. corresponding to those found in *Sondages 1* and *4*, and the remains of two consecutive “*peribolos*” walls closing in an area to the west of the roadbed comprising the building partially studied in *Sondage 4*. The archaeological layers recognized in *Sector “South”* date from the 7th-5th c. B.C. and from the Early Middle Ages; the sector also contains numerous ritual pits and caches provisionally called “*the southern sacrificial complex*”.

The excavations on a section of the roadbed situated to the south of *Sector “South”* and designated provisionally *Site IA* produced rather surprisingly some dwelling structures of the Late Bronze Age (*Colour Plates, Fig. 284*). Their accurate localisation is due to the professional insight and persistency of the archaeologist in charge of this sector, Dr S. Alexandrov.

The presence of scattered ceramic sherds on the surface of the roadbed still further south imposed the excavation of several trial trenches of limited size. Although their study yielded some pottery fragments from the 1st millennium B.C., the Roman Imperial period and the Middle Ages, no definite archaeological structures or layers were recognizable.

Trial excavations were undertaken also in several locations near the village of Sadovo to the south of Koprivlen which will also be affected by the impending construction of the road. It was established that the roadbed crosses the periphery of an archaeological site of the 1st millennium B.C. and does not affect cultural layers and structures. The scanty archaeological finds (mainly ceramic sherds) seem to have been transposed from their original place. Nevertheless, the trial excavations near Sadovo had some positive results in the establishment of cultural and chronological correspondence with the finds from Koprivlen, adding thus to the overall picture of the Thracian presence along the Middle Mesta.

The results of the archaeological excavations at Koprivlen have already been announced in a number of summary statements which were met with considerable interest among the professional circles in the country. The interim reports at the annual sessions of the *Institute of Archaeology* and some

preliminary communications before other academic forums⁴ presented only a general outline of the character of the archaeological discoveries. Aware of its responsibility in face of the interest of both specialists and the general public, the archaeological team has accepted the challenge to prepare and offer a detailed preliminary publication of the results of the excavations at Koprivlen, only a few months after their end. The opportune proposal by the investors from the *General Road Administration* to finance the publication of a complete volume has been accepted as a serious obligation towards the full implementation of the contract and a suitable occasion to present a fuller and more detailed account of our scientific results.

The short term in which the present book had to be prepared has determined its content and structure. The main intention of the authors was to offer a full preliminary presentation of the excavation results accompanied by analyses of field situations and of the more important groups of finds. The approach to the latter has however been selective in view both of the quantity of the material and of the stage of its study. It is for such reasons that some significant and interesting categories of finds such as the amphorae and the plain hand-made pottery have not been considered *in extenso* in the present publication. Some groups of imported pottery such as the few pieces of East-Greek, black- and red-figure vases have also not been analysed in any detail. A possible increase in their number in the future will provide better opportunities for their study. Various interdisciplinary investigations have accompanied the archaeological excavations in all the campaigns, and their results, if also partial and preliminary in some cases, are also presented briefly. The opening sections dedicated to the natural and economic characteristics of the region and the existing archaeological and historical evidence about its past were conceived as an introduction of the reader to the natural and ethno-cultural environment of the ancient settlement at Koprivlen.

The contents and structure of the volume were discussed and developed by all the members of the team, who also took an active part in the pre-printing and editorial work. In this respect the unfailing assistance of D. Vulcheva, S. Dimitrova and Y. Tsvetkova has been especially helpful.

This book is a collective enterprise, an outcome of the work of many specialists who took part in the field work and in the processing of the archaeological material. The joint efforts of all the team members, including the students, and of the consulting experts in certain special subjects (numismatics, interdisciplinary studies, etc.) have contributed to the successful completion of this stage of the research project.

A. Bozkova, P. Delev, D. Vulcheva, and V. Hadjiangelov were in charge of the field surveying team which first started the excavations at Koprivlen back in 1995. The excavations of the Thracian settlement of the 1st millennium B.C. and the later structures on its territory (*Site I*) in 1998-1999 were directed by A. Bozkova, P. Delev, and D. Vulcheva. In 1998 the team was joined by S. Alexandrov who took the responsibility for the excavations of the Late Bronze Age settlement (*Site IA*). The archaeologists V. Hadjiangelov, R. Nenova, Y. Marinova, S. Petrova, and I. Kulov also took part in different stages of the investigations around Koprivlen and Sadovo. H. Popov, S. Dimitrova, Y. Tsvetkova, V. Stanev, and V. Katsarova have been unfailing collaborators through all these years; they began their participation as students and now all of them are preparing PhD dissertations at different academic institutions. The advice and help of M. Tonkova and T. Marvakov at some points in the investigation has been valuable and appreciated. The excavations could not have been realized without the dedicated work of many students from the "St Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia, from the New Bulgarian University and from the Slavonic University; among them were B. Galabova, D. Dimitrov, G. Bobov, P. Devlova, R. Rasheva, V. Nikolova, M. Vaklinov, S. Shatov, and M. Nikolov, whose participation has been particularly active and persistent. N. Tonkov and V. Konstantinov carried out the geophysical prospecting and metal detection, and their high professionalism permitted the establishment of invaluable preliminary information about the presence of archaeological structures and cultural remains in and outside the excavated area. The field geodetic surveys were conducted by the indefatigable T. Balakchiev. T. Popova made the archaeobotanical investigation. The restoration of fragmented pottery was assigned to M. Tumpahova and I. Nacheva. V. Hadjiangelov, D. Hadjiangelov and M. Dineva did the drawings of the finds. Our devoted drivers, the brothers A. and D. Gyuranchev, were invaluable members of the expedition.

⁴ Bozkova 1997; Bozkova (in press); Delev et al. (in press); Vulcheva et al. (in press).

The successful archaeological explorations at Koprivlen in 1998-1999 owe much to the generous contribution of many different institutions and persons. It is my pleasant duty to thank here all those who have assisted and collaborated in the implementation of this large-scale project. On behalf of the team I would like to express our great appreciation to the *General Road Administration* for the timely initiation of the rescue excavations. The firm conviction in the importance of the cultural and historical heritage and in the necessity of its protection shown by K. Taushanov and P. Dikovski as Directors of the *General Road Administration* has created the conditions for the excellent collaboration with the *Institute of Archaeology*. The archaeological team has enjoyed the superior understanding and wholehearted co-operation of S. Silyanov to whom we owe very special thanks. The administrative tasks accompanying the implementation of the contract between the *General Road Administration* and the *Institute of Archaeology* were fulfilled accurately and in time thanks to the competent investment control carried out by "Pat Invest Engineering". Our gratitude goes to all its employees that have worked with us and especially to V. Zarev, G. Ivanova and I. Marinov.

The team members owe the warmest thanks to the Director and governing personnel of the *Institute of Archaeology* at the *Bulgarian Academy of Sciences* who have not only entirely entrusted us with the excavations but also shared all our academic and administrative problems. Our work has also been greatly facilitated by the competent and efficient accountant service provided by the Institute.

The excavations at Koprivlen have received the generous assistance of people and institutions in the town of Gotse Delchev and the neighbouring villages. Many organisational problems were solved with the helpful co-operation of Mr V. Moskov, Mayor of Gotse Delchev, Mr A. Belchev, Mayor of Koprivlen, and Mr I. Shindov, secretary of the Mayor's Office in Koprivlen. All the inhabitants of Koprivlen and the neighbouring villages demonstrated good will and interest in our work. Many of them participated personally as hired personnel in the excavations.

The archaeological expedition is also indebted for the help and support of the local offices of the *General Road Administration* and "Pat Invest Engineering" in the persons of Mr I. Kuyumdzhev, Mr K. Vulchev and Mr M. Kesedji.

The *Municipal Historical Museum* in Gotse Delchev housed the finds discovered in the course of the excavations, and will soon incorporate them in its permanent exposition. The devoted help of Miss S. Paskova, Chief Curator of the Museum, has facilitated very much our work on the documentation and analysis of the finds. Our heartfelt thanks go to Miss Paskova also for her commitment to the problems of the expedition and her efforts to provide the optimum working conditions for the team.

We would also like to address our heartfelt thanks to Prof. Roland Etienne and to the *École Française d'Archéologie* in Athens for their amiable hospitality in offering to two members of the team (P. Delev and S. Alexandrov) a work stay at the school in the autumn of 1999; the use of their excellent library was of exceptional significance for the early preparation of the present publication.

The magnificent results from the excavations in 1998 and 1999 were presented to the general public in two subsequent temporary exhibitions in the halls of the Historical Museum in Gotse Delchev (autumn 1998) and of the Archaeological Museum in Sofia (autumn 1999). Together with the present volume they have completed a stage in the explorations at Koprivlen, which we hope and believe will be continued in the future and will further contribute to the study of the rich cultural heritage of this isolated mountainous area.

II. THE MIDDLE MESTA REGION

II.1. THE MIDDLE MESTA REGION IN ANTIQUITY

Peter Delev

(University of Sofia "St Kliment Ohridski")

The Middle Mesta region which comprises in general outline the Nevrokop basin with the frontier mountain ridges surrounding it in the south, the slopes of the Pirin and Rhodope mountains in the west and east and the Momina Klisura gorge in the north, is mentioned in the extant ancient literary sources relatively seldom,¹ due no doubt to its relatively isolated location. The river *Nestos*, *Nessos* or *Mestos*, as the ancient authors call it (the form *Mestos* being evidenced only in the Roman Imperial Age),² appeared relatively early and was mentioned quite often in the ancient literary sources, if mostly in connection with its lowermost part near Abdera and the seaside; however Thucydides in the 5th c. B.C. could already offer precise information about the region of its sources.³ The name of the *Rhodope* mountains was the other toponym well known to the early Greek geographic tradition,⁴ though presumably as an indefinite general notion of a large mountain massif within which most likely the Rila and Pirin were also included.⁵

II.1.1. THE THRACIAN TRIBES

The Thracian tribes which inhabited the Middle Mesta region in antiquity are not clearly attested in the ancient literary tradition. Some specific details are mentioned as an exception in a paragraph of Pliny the Elder, which however leaves too many doubtful and uncertain points: "...the right side of the river Strymon is inhabited by the *Denseletae* and *Maedi* as far as the already mentioned *Bisaltae*; the left side – by the *Digerri* and many tribes of the *Bessi* as far as the river *Mestos*, which skirts the foot of the *Pangaeus* mountain [having passed?] among the *Haleti*, *Diobessi* and *Carbilesi*, and then among the *Brigae*, *Sapaei* and *Odomanti*".⁶ Pliny, who lived in the 1st c. A.D., was a most learned man of encyclopedic knowledge. He has not mentioned the sources of the short geographic description of Thrace in the fourth book of the *Naturalis Historia*, but the paragraph starts with the division of the country into fifty *strategies*, which places the whole passage in the context of the age when the Romans imposed their rule in Thrace.⁷

¹ A general review of the ancient literary evidence is to be found in Gerov 1961: 214-225.

² Detschew 1976: 299, 329, 330.

³ Thuc. 2.96.4.

⁴ Cf. for example Hdt. 4.49; 8.116.

⁵ The relation of the rather vague oronyms *Scombroi* (Thuc. 2.96.3; Arist. *Meteor.* 350b.16; cf. Detschew 1976:459) and *Dunax* (Strabo 4.6.12 = Polyb. 34.10.15; Liv. 40.58.2; cf. Detschew 1976: 153) with Rila is uncertain, as well as the enlargement of the scope of *Orbelos* (usually identified as Belasitsa after Hdt. 5.16) towards Southern Pirin or more definitely Ali Botush (on the basis mainly of Arr. *Anab.* 1.1.5, cf. Borza 1995: 89).

⁶ Plin. *N. H.* 4.40.

⁷ The question about the strategies in Thrace has been the subject of a long discussion in the scientific literature. Cf. Mihailov 1967; Mihailov 1967; Gerov 1970; Gerov 1978; Tacheva 1981; Tacheva 1983; Tacheva 1997: 170-174; Fol 1985; Kalojanov 1995. I adhere to the opinion that they would have been created in the period of revival of the "great" Odrysian Kingdom as a Roman protectorate in the 1st c. B.C.

Curtailed and incorrect versions of basically the same statement are found in later authors like Gaius Julius Solinus ("on the right bank of the Strymon live the *Denseletae* and many tribes of the *Bessi* as far as the Mesta river, which skirts the foots of Pangaeus")⁸ and Martianus Capella ("on the right side of the Strymon live the *Bessi* and *Denseletae* as far as the river Mestos, which skirts the Pangaeus").⁹ Both passages obviously derive from the text of Pliny the Elder, without adding any significant information to it.

If we ignore the general unreliability of this description¹⁰ and analyse it such as it is, we would still be at a loss to arrange the mentioned tribes on the geographical map because of its fundamental ambiguity. Pliny starts by placing the *Digerri* and *Bessi* between the Strymon and Mestos, and then in two consecutive groups along the latter first the *Haleti*, *Diobessi* and *Carbilesi*, and then the *Brigae*, *Sapaei* and *Odomanti*. One of the possible ways of interpretation is to place the *Digerri* and *Bessi* in the highlands of the mountains Rila¹¹ and Pirin, and then arrange the following tribes to the east of them in the valleys along the Mesta river basin (for example the *Haleti*, *Diobessi* and *Carbilesi* along its upper and middle course and the *Brigae*, *Sapaei* and *Odomanti* along the lower one). The other possible interpretation would be based on the idea that the ancient population was concentrated mainly in the fertile valleys, which should also be considered as the kernels of the Thracian tribal groups; accordingly the territories of the *Digerri* and *Bessi* would be extended in an easterly direction to the Upper and Middle Mesta valley,¹² and those of the following tribes should in this case be located to the south of them. Both hypotheses however are purely fictional and arise from the wish to place all the tribes listed by Pliny together on the geographical map. If however we were to assume that at least a part of the several ethnonyms placed by Pliny along the Mesta belonged to some of the "many tribes of the *Bessi*", the result would be essentially different (and maybe closer to the ancient reality).

The *Bessi*, located by Pliny between the Strymon and the Nestos, were already known to Herodotus who describes them, with reference to events at the beginning of the 5th c. B.C., as a part of the *Satrae* and prophets in the sanctuary of Dionysos. The *Satrae* themselves are defined as the warlike inhabitants of high mountains, who live among woods and snow and have always been independent.¹³ Herodotus also mentions the *Satrae* in connection with the area of the Pangaeus mountain, where according to him they had been working the gold and silver mines together with the *Pierres* and *Odomanti*;¹⁴ however the whole text gives the impression that the father of history gave this name rather to the numerous population in the interior mountainous territories of Southern Thrace, situated away from the coast. Even before Herodotus, the *Satrae* had been mentioned as a Thracian tribe by Hecataeus of Miletus, who is quoted in the *Ethnica* of Stephanus Byzantinus;¹⁵ and again Hecataeus has attested a tribe bearing the composite name *Satrokentai*.¹⁶

Relying mainly on the rather dubious information of Herodotus, the modern historical geography of the Thracian tribes placed the *Satrae* most often between the Strymon and Nestos, whether only in the area of Mount Pangaeus or in a larger region including the Pangaeus at its southern end and comprising the mountainous massifs of Bozdag, Sharlia, Cherna Gora, Ali Botush and, according to some opinions, also the whole of the Pirin, while others were ready to add moreover the Rila and even Vitosha in the north.¹⁷ Later, T. Sarafov expounded his theory (gladly accepted by other scholars too) that the tribal territory of the *Satrae* should be enlarged eastwards in order to include also the main part of the Rhodope mountains.¹⁸

⁸ Solin. 10.

⁹ Mart. Cap. 6.656.

¹⁰ Some of the Thracian tribes mentioned by Pliny are absolutely unknown from other sources and some seem to have been incorrectly located. In the next sentence from the Natural History, for example, among the tribes from the Odrisian lands in the valley of the Hebros Pliny mentions the *Botiei* and *Edoni*, which is obviously incorrect.

¹¹ Cf. however Thuc. 2.96.4 with the affirmation that Rila was uninhabited.

¹² Such was the opinion of Gerov 1961: 160, 218.

¹³ Hdt. 7.111.

¹⁴ Hdt. 7.112, 110.

¹⁵ Steph. Byz. 557, 24.

¹⁶ Steph. Byz. (*FGrH* 1, F 181).

¹⁷ For a detailed review of the locations cf. Sarafov 1974: 123-137.

¹⁸ Ibid. 149-176.

The name of the Satrae vanishes from the literary sources after its last mention by Herodotus. In the work of Thucydides the ethnonym of the *Dii* appears instead; these were highlanders independent of the rule of the Odrysae, bearing swords and inhabiting the Rhodope mountains, who in 429 B.C. voluntarily joined the campaign of the Odrysian king Sitalces in Macedonia and Chalcidice.¹⁹ And again Thucydides tells of a party of 1300 peltasts “from the Thracians bearing swords of the *Diakoi* clan”, who came to Athens in 413 B.C. as mercenaries, but were sent off and on their way back took and plundered the small town of Mycalessos in Boeotia; it is possible that the name is corrupted in the text or represents a variant of the name of the *Dii*.²⁰ Henceforth the name of the *Dii* also disappears from the written sources for a long time. In connection with the campaign of Alexander the Great in Thrace in 335 B.C. Flavius Arrianus mentions only the lands of the “independent Thracians”, but their identification with the *Satrae* of Herodotus and the *Dii* of Thucydides seems quite possible in the light of the context of the paragraph²¹ and also because of an incidental mention in Suetonius that Alexander had visited (most probably during this very campaign) the famous sanctuary of Dionysos, where he had received a fiery omen from the oracle of the god.²² The *Dii* were mentioned again only by Publius Cornelius Tacitus in the description of events from the time of the emperor Tiberius – the revolt of the *Coelaetae*, *Odrysae* and *Dii* in 21 A.D. against the pro-Roman king Roemetalces who was besieged in Philippopolis and later escaped only as a result of the timely intervention of the army of the pro-praetor of Moesia Publius Velleius.²³

Returning now to the *Bessi*, mentioned by Herodotus as only a part of the *Satrae* and prophets in the famous sanctuary of Dionysos, it should be pointed out that in the course of time their name turned more and more popular, until in Late Antiquity it became a synonym of “Thracians” in general.²⁴ Polybius and Titus Livius refer to a campaign of Philip V in the lands of the Odrysae, *Bessi* and *Dentheleti* in 183 B.C.²⁵ In the course of the two centuries following the establishment of the Roman province of Macedonia, the *Bessi* are being mentioned repeatedly in the literary sources as traditional Roman enemies in Thrace; they often acted also as the adversaries of the pro-Roman Odrysian rulers.²⁶ Unfortunately, most of the texts reflecting the events of this period do not offer any information at all about the geographical position of the *Bessi* or of any of the other mentioned Thracian tribes. The scarce evidence concerning this question is quite contradictory and has given start to a long and still open discussion among the modern historians. While some authors have preferred to locate the *Bessi* in the Rhodope region and to consider them a highland population,²⁷ others have spread their territories northwards to the Stara Planina (the Balkan range) and Sredna Gora mountains, including also the western part of the upper Hebros valley, according to some as far as Philippopolis in the east.²⁸ The second opinion is based on a general statement in Strabo that the *Bessi* lived near the river Hebros,²⁹ on the location of the Roman road station *Bessapara* near Sinitovo in the region of Pazardjik,³⁰ and especially on the connection established between the *Bessi* and the Haemus mountain again

¹⁹ Thuc. 2.96.

²⁰ Thuc. 7.27.1-2, 29.1-30.3. Cf. Detschew 1976: 130.

²¹ Arr. *Anab.* 1.1.5. (starting from Amphipolis, Alexander entered the lands of the independent Thracians, passing to the right of the city of Philippi and of the mountain Orbelos; on the tenth day after the crossing of the Nestos he reached the mountain Haemus).

²² Suet. *Aug.* 94.6.

²³ Tac. *ann.* 3.38-39.

²⁴ On the *Bessi* cf. Katsarov 1924; Sarafov 1974.

²⁵ Polyb. 23.8. 3-7; Liv. 39.53.12-14.

²⁶ Cf. Chapter II.1.6 *infra*.

²⁷ Sarafov 1974.

²⁸ Katsarov 1924: 31; Venedikov 1969: 43 ff.; Fol 1975: 77-83. Tacheva 1995: 12-14 limits the presence of the *Bessi* in only part of the Upper Thracian Valley, but spreads their territory in the whole Western Stara Planina. Cf. also Boteva 1996 with an attempt to locate the Bessic sanctuary of Dionysos in the Etropole Mountain.

²⁹ Strabo 7.f 47: *along the Hebros live the Corpili and then upwards the Breni and at the end the Bessi; the river is navigable as far as there*. In the following part of the same paragraph however Strabo is credited with the key statement that the *Bessi* were neighbours of both the *Odrysae* and the *Sapaei*, which would automatically send their location in the Rhodope region.

³⁰ Tsonchev 1950. According to an inscription from Philippopolis (Mihailov 1961: 947) there existed an *Upper* and a *Lower Bessapara*.

in the work of Strabo.³¹ The expansion of the ethnonym of the Bessi over such an enormous territory puts in serious doubt their interpretation as a tribe or a tribal group; it could hardly be explained also by the assumption that the name was used as the denomination of a specific type of population.³²

The seventh book of Strabo's "Geography" containing the description of Thrace is preserved incompletely, partly in fragments, and the text contains many evident inconsistencies. The last quoted passage is among the most problematic ones: the Bessi are mentioned as inhabitants of the Haemus together with the rather uncertain Coralli and the evidently mistaken Maedi and Dentheleti who are in fact definitely located in the valley of the Strymon. This patent mistake provides good reasons to suspect that Strabo systematically (here and in several other places) confuses the Balkan mountain range (Haemus) with the mountain Rila, probably being misled by his sources.³³ If such be the case, the passage in question could have derived from an initial information enumerating the tribes along the Strymon, around the Rila mountain (= Haemus) and as far as the Pontos river (Strumeshnitsa) in the south.³⁴ This suggestion conforms better with the next affirmation of Strabo in the same paragraph, in which the territories of the Bessi are said to be adjacent to the Rhodope mountains and to the territories of the Paeones and of the Illyrian tribes of the Autariatae and Dardani.³⁵ The suggestion becomes even more plausible because in another (though confused textually) paragraph from the seventh book of Strabo the mountains Haemus and Rhodope are explicitly related with the valley of the Strymon.³⁶ The well known story in Titus Livius about the ascent of the Macedonian king Philip V to "the peak of the mountain Haemus" could be added to the arguments: on his way to the mountain Philip passed through the lands of the Maedi, and after the unfortunate climbing he immediately devastated the lands of the Dentheleti who were his allies.³⁷

If the relation of the Bessi with Stara Planina (the Balkan mountain range) is discarded, it becomes easier to ignore also the evidence locating them in the valley of the Hebros and to accept the basic idea of Sarafov according to which they were the inhabitants of the highland Rhodope region, with the explicit postulation that their territories extended in the west to comprise the whole Rila massif (and maybe also the range of the Pirin to the south of it?) – and this fits perfectly with the assertion of Pliny which places them to the east of the Strymon.

The *Digerri* (or *Digeri*) who appear together with the Bessi in Pliny, are also mentioned as a Thracian tribe (but with no location) by Stephanus Byzantinus who quotes the thirteenth book of Polybius as his source.³⁸ Their name is similar to the names of the *Pyrogeri* and *Drugeri* mentioned in the subsequent text of Pliny as tribes on Odrysian territory in the valley of the Hebros,³⁹ but this could

³¹ Strabo 7.5.12: *Then come the Corali, Bessi, some Maedi and Dentheleti who live around and bellow the Haemus as far as the Pontus. These tribes are all given to plundering, and the Bessi who inhabit the larger part of the mountain Haemus are called brigands by the brigands themselves. They live in huts and live a poor life.*

³² With a possible meaning of "highlanders", "ore-miners", "independent" or something else. However, it is doubtful that a similar epithet was ascribed simultaneously to the independent mountainous population in the Rhodopes and to the lowlanders of the fertile Upper Hebros Valley who were controlled by the Odrysae.

³³ It remains however unclear whether the evident inconsistency in Strabo should be attributed to a mistake in the ancient literary tradition or to an authentic coincidence of the names of the two mountains. It seems perfectly possible to assume that the oronym *Haemus* could have derived from a common noun in the Thracian language (with a sense, for example, of "high mountain", "snowy mountain" or something similar).

³⁴ On the river *Pontos* cf. Detschew 1976: 374.

³⁵ Strabo 7.5.12. A part of the Autariatae (whose main territories were further to the north, in the valley of the Morava) were settled by Cassander "near the mountain Orbelos" (Diod. 20.19.1; Justin. 15.2.1-2). The territory of the Dardani is located around the upper reaches of the Axios with Scupi (Scopie) as a centre. In Strabo (7.5.1, Cf. 7.f 4) the Autariatae and Dardani are the northern neighbours of the Paeoni.

³⁶ Strabo 7.f 36. On the basis of this paragraph, of 7.5.1 (where the Rhodope mountains border on Paeonia) and of 7.f 10 (where Rhodope and Haemus are neighbouring mountains) the suggested hypothesis could be further developed in the sense that in all these cases the name *Rhodope* was actually ascribed to the *Pirin*. The transferring of the names Haemus and Rhodope to designate the Rila and Pirin mountains could result also from a general geographical idea of the position of the two pairs of mountains.

³⁷ Liv. 40.21.2, 22.1-12.

³⁸ Steph. Byz. 229.19. The thirteenth book of Polybius included an account of the actions of Philip V in Thrace in 205-204 B.C., and the mention of the *Digerri* could be related to these.

³⁹ Plin. *N. H.* 4.40.

hardly be a good enough reason to suggest that the three tribes were situated close to one another, for example in the eastern part of the Rila and along the upper reaches of the Nestos and the Hebros. The similarity of the names would rather be purely linguistic, and the common second part (*geri*) probably had a semantic and not an onomastic significance.⁴⁰ Besides, the *Tabula Peutingeriana* puts the Pyrogeri between Philippopolis and Hadrianopolis and also shows another tribe with a similar name – *Bet-tegerri* – in the region between Ainos and the *Asticus Mons* (Strandja);⁴¹ Pliny himself adds yet another such name – that of the tribe of the *Celegeri* who lived somewhere in the province of Moesia in the north.⁴²

The etymology of the name *Digerri* is not clear, but the above parallels with second component *-geri* make the division *Di-gerri* obvious. It is worth considering whether the first component of the name (*di-*) does not correspond to the ethnonym *Dii* (with the variant *Diakoi*?) in Thucydides and Tacitus. Following *stricto sensu* the logic of the arrangement of the tribes along the Strymon in the first part of Pliny's passage (*Dentheleti* – *Maedi* – *Bisaltae*, i.e. from north to south), the *Digerri* should be placed to the north of the *Bessi*. If on the other hand we accept the opinion of T. Sarafov, who considers the *Dii* (= *Digerri*?) and the *Bessi* as different names for one and the same highland population, we may think of the possibility to refer Pliny's remark "*multa nomina*" to both mentioned ethnonyms and read his text as "*Digerri and Bessi, many tribes*".

In the second part of the same paragraph Pliny lists the names of tribes living along the Nestos, grouping them into two series: first the *Haleti*, *Diobessi* and *Carbilesi*, and then the *Brigae*, *Sapaei* and *Odomanti*. The name of the *Haleti* is not known from other sources; D. Detschew compares it to the second component of compound names like *Denth-eleti*, *Coel-aetae*, etc.⁴³ The composite name *Diobessi* is also a *hapax legomenon*,⁴⁴ but both its component parts are well known; it closes in a perfect way the ethnonymic sequence *Bessi* – *Satrae* – *Dii* already discussed above. The name of the *Carbilesi* is also mentioned solely in this text; however it resembles very much the name *Carbileti* mentioned in the following text of the same paragraph as inhabitants of the valley of the Hebros. Detschew suggested that one and the same tribal group was meant in both instances, and was inclined to locate it accordingly somewhere in the north-western parts of the Rhodope mountains.⁴⁵

The three names included in the following group are better attested in the ancient tradition. Most enigmatic here are the *Brygae*; the name is an emendation by the publishers of Pliny in place of the *Brysae* (or, *Brisae*) of the codices, which would have been a *hapax legomenon*. The correction however remains uncertain; the name *Brysae/Brisae* may be related to a large enough series of Thracian language remains,⁴⁶ and on the other hand this would be the only text in which the *Brygae*, otherwise well-attested in the ancient sources, would have been placed anywhere near the Lower Mesta region, even if their other known locations vary in quite broad geographical limits.⁴⁷ The variant suggestions to consider the *Brygae* of Pliny as a part of the Phrygians left in the area during their migration to Anatolia, as a part of the Macedonian *Brygae* pushed out of Central Macedonia together with the *Pieres* during the early territorial expansion of the Macedonians, or as a remnant of the same Macedonian *Brygae* resettled by the Persians after their defeat by Mardonius in 492 B.C., seem all rather strained because of the lack of any evidence about their presence on the lower Nestos in the whole earlier, pre-Plinian literary tradition; the same objection however can be raised to the alternative *Brysae*.

The other two tribal groups do not raise similar doubts. The *Sapaei* are attested since the time of Herodotus, who locates them between the *Bistones* and the *Dersaei* in his enumeration of the tribes

⁴⁰ Tomaschek 1980: I.87; Detschew 1976: 102.

⁴¹ TP 8.2, 4/5.

⁴² Plin. *N. H.* 4.40.

⁴³ Detschew 1976: 12.

⁴⁴ Detschew 1976: 140.

⁴⁵ Detschew 1976: 227.

⁴⁶ Detschew 1976: 87-92 mentions βρίζα, Βριζενις, -brisa, Βρισαῖος, Βρυζος.

⁴⁷ For example in Central Macedonia around the mountain Bermion, in the basin of the river Erigon (Cherna) with the town of Cydrae, and even further westwards round the Ceraunian mountains; cf. e. g. Hdt. 6.45; Strabo 7.7.8-9, 7. F 25. On the *Brygae* cf. Oberhummer 1897; Detschew 1976: 91-92; Venedikov 1982: 98-101; Papazoglou 1988: 271-272; Petrova 1996: 135 f.

along the North Aegean coast.⁴⁸ In the 2nd c. B.C. a ruler of the Sapaei called Abrupolis interfered actively in the conflict between the Macedonian Kingdom and the Roman Republic,⁴⁹ and in the 1st c. B.C. the Sapaei presumably managed with Roman protection to seize the power in the Odrysian Kingdom, establishing its last dynasty ruling in Byzia.⁵⁰ Strabo locates them above the coastal area of Abdera and Maroneia, i.e. in the southernmost parts of the Rhodope mountains.⁵¹ According to Appian, in 42 B.C. the army of Brutus and Cassius bypassed the *Sapaeian pass* through the homonymous *Sapaeian mountain* and descended directly into the plain of Drama near Philippi.⁵² The stability of these localizations over a very long period of time not only confirms their authenticity, but also suggests that the Sapaei, in contrast to other more ephemeral tribes, represented a numerous highland population permanently settled in this area. Unfortunately, the exact establishment of their tribal territories remains impossible, including the key question of their frontiers in the west and north-west which are relevant to the present study.

The *Odomanti* also appear early into the ancient literary tradition.⁵³ Herodotus mentions them twice always in connection with Mount Pangaeus: first, together with the Doberi and Agrianes, as one of the tribes who had preserved their independence during the campaign of Megabazus against the Paeones in the valley of the Strymon,⁵⁴ and then again, together with the Satrae and Pieres, as ore-miners extracting gold and silver from the mountain.⁵⁵ Thucydides on the contrary considers them a lowland population in an important paragraph of his history, locating them together with the *Panaei*, *Droi* and *Dersaei* in the plains along the eastern bank of the Lower Strymon and adding that at the time of the campaign of Sitalces in 429 B.C. all these tribes were independent.⁵⁶ Thucydides mentions also a king of the Odomanti called *Poles* who was an ally of the Athenians in the battle of Amphipolis.⁵⁷ Polybius likewise placed the Odomanti to the east of Strymon,⁵⁸ according to Strabo the river separated them from the *Bisaltae*.⁵⁹ On the basis of a mention of the town *Sirae* in Odomantica in Titus Livius,⁶⁰ the lands of the Odomanti have been traditionally located in the region of the plain of Seres, usually with the addition of the western part of the plain of Drama and the mountains rising above them – Sharlia (Vrundu) and Zmiynitsa (Menikion).⁶¹ In the 5th century however Herodotus considered *Siris* a Paeonian town,⁶² and if the two versions denote the same toponym (easily identified with the modern town of Seres), the sources definitely create the impression that the ethnic map of the region had radically changed in the period between the 5th and the 2nd c. B.C.

Notwithstanding the general uncertainty of these localizations and the suggested possibility for changes in the course of time, the extant sources create the overall impression that the tribal groups of the Sapaei and Odomanti were more or less permanently settled in areas situated to the east of the lower reaches of the Nestos for the former, and to the east of the Strymon for the latter. This conclusion in its turn leads to the inference that the account of Pliny, at least in this part, is rather general and includes tribal names spread over a large area around the lower reaches of the Nestos and still preserving their relative importance in the age of the establishment of Roman domination over the Balkans. The earlier authors mention in this wider geographical area around the lower Strymon and Nestos several other Thracian tribes, whose absence from the list of Pliny can be interpreted as the result of a gradual degradation of their tribal identity after the region fell under Macedonian rule in the 4th

⁴⁸ Hdt. 7.110.

⁴⁹ The sources in Fol 1975: 77.

⁵⁰ Tacheva 1997: 83 f.

⁵¹ Strabo 7.f 43.

⁵² App. Civ. 431-438.

⁵³ Oberhummer 1937; Detschew 1976: 336.

⁵⁴ Hdt. 5.16.

⁵⁵ Hdt. 7.112.

⁵⁶ Thuc. 2.101.3.

⁵⁷ Thuc. 5.6.2. Cf. also Aristoph. *Ach.* 156 sqq.

⁵⁸ Polyb. 36.10.4.

⁵⁹ Strabo 7. F36.

⁶⁰ Liv. 45.4.2.

⁶¹ Papazoglou 1988: 377-384.

⁶² Hdt. 8.115; cf. Detschew 1976: 448.

century. Among these tribes not mentioned by Pliny, most important historically were the *Edoni*,⁶³ located in the 5th century in the region around Mount Pangaeus. The *Pieres*,⁶⁴ whom Herodotus defines as settlers from Macedonia, occupied in the same period the southern slopes of the Pangaeus. Herodotus places between the Sapaei and the Edoni the *Dersaei*, who are also mentioned by Thucydides; some modern authors have tried to identify them with the *Derroni* who are known only from their splendid coins.⁶⁵ Herodotus mentions, always in connection with the same region, also the *Satrae* who were already mentioned above, the *Paeoplae*, *Doberi*, *Agrianes*, *Paeones* and *Siriopaeones*;⁶⁶ Thucydides adds the names of the *Droi* and *Panaei*.⁶⁷ The otherwise unknown *Orrescii* minted large quantities of excellent coins at the end of the 6th and in the first half of the 5th c. B.C.; their probable location in the area is based only on the numismatic correlation between their coins and the early strikes of the island of Thasos.⁶⁸ Besides the probable location in the region of the Orrescii and the possible (but more uncertain) one of the Derroni, there is a more remote possibility to place somewhere in the same area also the hypothetical tribes of the *Ichnaei*, *Tynteni* and *Letaei*, whose names are reconstructed from the legends on silver coins minted in the same period.⁶⁹

The sources in general present quite a variegated picture of the tribes inhabiting the region around the lower Strymon and Nestos; it should however be kept in mind that in reality the system could have been rather dynamic and it is not at all surprising that some tribal names have been mentioned only sporadically. The factors determining this instability were the strategic situation of the region and its notorious riches, which had made it the object of repeated aggressive and expansionistic activities by foreign political powers, including the Greek colonists, the Persian Empire, the Athenian Empire, the Odrysian Kingdom, until, in the end, the whole region was integrated permanently in the Macedonian Kingdom. The fact that the ethnonyms of the Sapaei and Odomanti were preserved till Roman times should probably be related with the gradual withdrawal of their respective tribal territories from the contended coastal and lowland areas towards the mountains of the near interior, which allowed them to preserve their tribal identity.

If, in conclusion, we return once more to the text of Pliny enumerating the tribes in the region of the Nestos, it becomes obvious that the three last mentioned groups – the *Brygae* (or, *Brysae*), *Sapaei* and *Odomanti* – should be located generally in the mountains around the modern state frontier between Bulgaria and Greece. This allows to place the lands of the foregoing *Haleti*, *Diobessi* and *Carbilesi* further in the north. However, the picture remains too vague and lacking in details, and it is not possible to suggest anything more definite about the ancient population in the Nevrokop (Gotse Delchev) basin. The *Haleti*, *Diobessi* and *Carbilesi* could have belonged to the tribal community of the *Bessi*, not only because of Pliny's remark about the numerous tribes of the latter, but also for the characteristic composite ethnic name of the *Diobessi*; this assumption suggests further a possible division between the lands of the *Bessi* in the north and those of the *Sapaei* and *Odomanti* in the south. The impossibility to outline clearly the northern boundary of the latter does not allow, however, to reach any definite conclusions. Most likely, only the eventual discovery of an explicit epigraphical monument might one day throw some more light into this entangled and obscure question.

II.1.2. THE GREEK COLONIZATION

The archaeological material accumulated especially in the last several years strengthens the impression that stable and very old relations existed between the Middle Mesta region and the littoral which was open to the direct influence of the maritime civilizations controlling successively the navigation and sea trade in the Aegean. It seems that relations of this kind existed as early as the *Mycenaean Age* (16th – 12th c. B.C.), as attested by the so far sporadic finds of Mycenaean pottery near Ko-

⁶³ Detschew 1976: 197-199; Fol 1972: 104-106; Papazoglou 1988: 385-414.

⁶⁴ Detschew 1976: 366-368.

⁶⁵ Detschew 1976: 120, 128; Fol 1972: 99-101.

⁶⁶ Hdt. 5.15-16; 7.113.

⁶⁷ Thuc. 2.101.3. According to St. Byz. 499.3 the *Panaei* were an Edonian tribe near Amphipolis.

⁶⁸ Kraay 1976: 139; Yurukova 1992: 16. Coins of the *Orrescii* have been found near Gotse Delchev, cf. Gerasimov 1939, 344; Yurukova 1979: 59.

⁶⁹ Cf. Chapter II.1.3 infra.

privlen.⁷⁰ No certain evidence of archaeological character has been found as yet to confirm similar contacts during the *Geometric Age* (11th – 8th c. B.C.), when they could be supposed both with the Phoenicians established on the island of Thasos and on the opposite coast⁷¹ and with the Euboean Greeks, whose early (pre-colonization) influence in the Chalcidic Peninsula seems lately more and more certain.⁷² The authentic imported materials from the *Archaic Age* (from the second half of the 8th till the end of the 6th c. B.C.), found in the course of the excavations at Koprivlen, should obviously be related with the results of the Greek colonization in the coastal area.

The earliest colonization activities in the North-Western Aegean area were those of the Euboean towns Chalcis and Eretria in the Chalcidic Peninsula.⁷³ Before or at least about the middle of the 8th c. B.C. the Euboeans started founding their settlements in the region; among them – the Eretrian colony of *Mende* in Palene and the Chalcidian one of *Torone* in Sitonia. The total number of Euboean colonies in Chalcidice reached several dozens, most of them small towns which have not left a significant trace in the historical tradition. The opinion that the early Euboean colonization in Chalcidice was exclusively of agrarian character does not seem convincing,⁷⁴ especially in view of the active minting and the broad diffusion of the coins of the Chalcidic towns in the Archaic period.⁷⁵

The Dorians appeared in Chalcidice very little later than the Euboeans, but their foundations remained isolated. About the end of the 7th or at the beginning of the 6th c. B.C. Corinth founded *Potidaea* on the neck of Palene.⁷⁶ *Scione* on the same peninsula was probably founded by Achaeans from Pelene in North Peloponnesos.⁷⁷ In the middle of the 7th c. B.C. the Cycladic island of Andros carried out an active colonization in the eastern part of Chalcidice with the help of Euboea; among its colonies were *Acanthus*, *Sane*, *Stageira* and *Argilos*.⁷⁸

Also in the middle of the 7th c. B.C. Paros, another Cycladic island, colonized the island of *Thasos*, founding one of the most prosperous Greek poleis near the Thracian coast.⁷⁹ The Thasians occupied quite early the opposite coast on the mainland, the so called *Thasian Perea*, where they established many of their own foundations; particularly important among these was the port of *Neapolis* (the modern Kavala).⁸⁰

Abdera to the east of the mouth of the Nestos was founded first in the middle of the 7th century by Ionians from Clazomenae in Anatolia, but the colony was soon destroyed by the hostile Thracians. It was re-founded a century later again by Ionians, this time from Theos, who had fled their city after West Anatolia was conquered by the Persians.⁸¹

In the 5th c. B.C. new colonization efforts were undertaken by Athens which was going through the period of its acme at the head of the Delian League, of which the Greek cities along the coast of South-Western Thrace were all members. After successfully expelling in 476 B.C. the Persians from *Eion* at the mouth of the Strymon, the Athenians re-colonized it and turned it into the main base for their subsequent attempts to penetrate into the interior.⁸² In 465 B.C., at the time of the Thasos uprising, Athens sent ten thousand colonists to *Ennea Hodoi* ("The nine roads"), upstream on the Strymon, on the place of the future Amphipolis. The campaign finished with a complete disaster after

⁷⁰ Cf. Chapter III infra.

⁷¹ Salviat, Servais 1964: 278-284; Graham 1978: 88-92. On the basis of the information of Herodotus (Hdt. 2.44; 6.46-47) it has been suggested that the Phoenician presence was directly connected with the mining of precious metals.

⁷² Vokotopoulou, Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1988: 81; Tiverios 1998: 249.

⁷³ On the *Chalcidic Peninsula* and its colonization cf. Harrison 1912; West 1919; Bradeen 1952; Berard 1960: 66-68; Zahrt 1971.

⁷⁴ Boardman 1988: 229.

⁷⁵ Kraay 1976: 132.

⁷⁶ On *Potidaea* cf. Alexander 1963.

⁷⁷ Thuc. 4. 120. 1.

⁷⁸ Thuc. 4. 84. 1; 88.2; 103.3; 109.2; 5.6.1; Plut. *mor.* 298 AB.

⁷⁹ From the numerous books on *Thasos* cf. for example the series *Études Thasiennes*; Pouilloux et al. 1954/1958; Lazaridis 1958; *Guide de Thasos* 1968; about the date of the foundation cf. Graham 1978.

⁸⁰ On *Neapolis* and the *Thasian Perea* cf. Bakalakis 1936; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1980b: 309-325; Isaac 1986: 8-12, 64-71.

⁸¹ On *Abdera* cf. Berard 1960: 92-95; May 1966; Lazaridis 1971; Isaac 1986: 73-111; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1988; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1994.

⁸² On *Eion* cf. Isaac 1986: 60-62; Papazoglou 1988: 388-389.

the defeat of the colonists in a big battle with the Thracians near Drabescos.⁸³ About 445 B.C. the Athenians founded *Brea*, the location of which is sought for either in the lands of the Bisaltae above the western bank of Strymon or in the southwest, in the Chalcidic area.⁸⁴ In 437/6 B.C. the Athenian general Hagnon founded, this time successfully, the city of *Amphipolis*.⁸⁵ Situated at a place naturally defended by a meander of the river, the new city had a strategic importance because of the control over the land roads across the lower Struma and over the silver and gold mines in the region and especially because it provided easy access to sources of quality timber which were essential for the ship-building industry of Athens.

The attack of the Athenians against *Potidaea* which had deserted from their league was among the causes for the outburst of the Peloponnesian war; the seizure of the old Corinthian colony in 429 B.C. remained however their last success in the region. At the same time *Olynthus* had also left the Athenian League. Once a town of the Botiei given by the Persian Artabazus to the Chalcidians, now Olynthus was resettled with a part of the population of the smaller Chalcidian towns and the Athenians were unable to regain control of the city which had now become too strong and had succeeded in uniting the remaining towns of Chalcidice into a political union.⁸⁶ The crash of the Athenian expansion came in 424 B.C. when the Spartan Brasidas seized Amphipolis and deprived Athens of its most important gain in Thrace; the attempt of the democratic leader Cleon to change the situation failed in a great battle under the walls of the city, in which both Cleon and Brasidas found their death. It is worth noticing that Thucydides mentions the active participation of the Thracians of the region in these dramatic events: at the time of the seizure of Amphipolis Brasidas received the help of the Edoni from Myrkinos, after their former king Pittakos was killed in a coup.⁸⁷ Later, in the big battle at Amphipolis, one thousand and five hundred Thracian mercenaries and the whole army of the Edoni consisting of peltasts and cavalry, plus another thousand peltasts from the Edonian Myrkinos were fighting in the army of Brasidas,⁸⁸ while the king of the Odomanti Poles brought an unspecified, but in any case considerable number of Thracian mercenaries for the army of Cleon.⁸⁹

In the 4th c. B.C. Athens recovered from the defeat in the Peloponnesian war and made a determined, if finally unsuccessful attempt to revive its old power; its endeavours to regain Amphipolis however failed. Potidaea and Eion became the main bases of the newly activated Athenians policy in the region during the second quarter of the century. In Chalcidice Olynthus experienced a short period of might at the head of the Chalcidian League. Thasos entered a long period of prosperity and stable trade, reflected in the long series of stamped amphorae, in which the citizens of the island exported their famous wine during the 4th and 3rd century. Abdera, on the opposite, met with an unexpected disaster when in 375 B.C. the Triballi reached the town in the course of a devastating raid, defeated the citizens in a battle after these had been betrayed by some "neighbouring Thracians" who had seemingly come to their help, and only the timely intervention of an Athenian fleet prevented their entering into the wealthy town.⁹⁰ The question whether and in what way this event affected the Middle Mesta region remains completely hypothetical. In the middle of the 4th century the Macedonian invasion into the lands of South-Western Thrace changed radically the fate of the Greek coastal cities. Many of them, like Olynthus, were destroyed; others, like Amphipolis, were re-colonized and obtained an important role in the Macedonian administrative system in the region; others still, like Thasos and Abdera, survived and adapted to the dynamically changing political and economical situation.

The Greek colonization of the coastal regions was of paramount importance for the development of the Thracian tribes living in the near or deeper interior. Involved in intensive economical and political relations with the colonists, the Thracians inevitably experienced their cultural influence. The interrelations between the colonies and the Thracian tribes were complicated, many-sided and often

⁸³ Isaac 1986: 24-30

⁸⁴ Isaac 1986: 51-52. A colonization move to the lands of the Bisaltae rich in silver has been placed by Plut. *Per.* 11.5 in the time of Pericles.

⁸⁵ On *Amphipolis* Papastavru 1936; Lazaridis 1972; Isaac 1986: 35-48, 54-58.

⁸⁶ On *Olynthus* Gude 1933; the results of the long term archaeological excavations have been published by D. M. Robinson et al. in the series *Excavations at Olynthus*.

⁸⁷ Thuc. 4. 107. 3.

⁸⁸ Thuc. 5. 6. 4.

⁸⁹ Thuc. 5. 6. 2.

⁹⁰ Diod. 15. 36. 1-4; cf. Fol 1975: 13-14.

contradictory, but undoubtedly they represented a factor of major importance in the historical development of the Thracian lands from the Archaic Age onwards. The first results of the archaeological excavations near Koprivlen have shown unequivocally that here these contacts and relations were both of very old date and presumably most intensive, which makes the site exceptionally interesting and promising for their future study.

II.1.3. SOUTH-WESTERN THRACE IN THE 6TH AND 5TH CENTURY B.C.

The archaeological excavations near Koprivlen have proved for the first time, but categorically enough, that the Middle Mesta region was part of a broader geographical area around the lower courses of the Nestos, Strymon and Axios, which experienced during the 6th and in the first half of the 5th c. B.C. that remarkable economic, political and cultural prosperity which is reflected most clearly in the marvellous finds from the necropolises by Sindos and Agia Paraskevi near Thessaloniki.⁹¹ This phenomenon remains insufficiently studied in the specialized literature, which continues to use quite often the evidently imprecise formula of the "Thraco-Macedonian" tribes. Together with the early tribal coinage, which has been a subject of scientific interest for a long period of time,⁹² the spread of the local wheel-made pottery with geometric decoration painted in red or brown, impressive amounts of which have been found among the materials from Koprivlen, has only recently been recognized as another element of the cultural community of the region in this age.⁹³

The literary tradition creates the impression that the population in the region was subject to dynamic changes in the course of time, and that a certain amount of ethnical heterogeneity had always existed. The *Thracian* factor seems however to have been predominant in the early ages, a Thracian affiliation being ascribed to most of the tribes mentioned by the ancient authors.⁹⁴ The presence of *Paeonian* tribes is also documented with certainty, especially in the region of Lower Strymon.⁹⁵ *Chalcidians* and *Botiei* were present in the Chalcidic Peninsula; the latter, according to the written sources, were settlers from Central Macedonia, while the Chalcidians are differently identified either with the Euboean colonists in Chalcidice, or as a separate group of local (and most likely non-Greek) population.⁹⁶ A vague piece of information places a Pelasgian enclave in the interior of the Chalcidic peninsula.⁹⁷ The location of the Brygae, related by Herodotus to the Phrygians of Anatolia, remains dubious; the information of Pliny about their possible presence in the Lower Nestos region has already been commented on above. At quite an early date, this varied enough ethnic picture was further diversified with the arrival of the different Greek colonists (Euboeans, Corinthians, Ionians from the islands and from Asia, Athenians) who settled mainly along the seaside.

The reasons for the appearance, at the end of the 6th or in the beginning of the 5th c. B.C.,⁹⁸ of the heavy silver coinage of the tribes in South-Western Thrace, remain inadequately explained. Among the suggested ideas is the probable imposition of a royal tax after the establishment of Persian domination in the region with the campaign of Megabazus of about 514/513 B.C.;⁹⁹ this agrees with the numerous finds of such coins in hoards from the territory of the Achaemenid Empire in Asia and Egypt and gives a satisfactory explanation of the existence of unusually large denominations. However, the intensive development of the region was a fact long before the coming of the Persians, as becomes more and more evident with the accumulation of archaeological evidence. The mining of silver

⁹¹ Sindos 1985; Sismanidis 1987.

⁹² On the early tribal coinage cf. Kraay 1976: 138-141; Yurukova 1992: 9-33; Topalov 1998: 22-162; for a political interpretation of the numismatic data Zlatkovskaya 1971: 178-203; Fol 1972: 86-106.

⁹³ Cf. *Chapter IV.4.2* infra.

⁹⁴ Cf. the general review in Fol 1972: 86-108.

⁹⁵ For example Hdt. 5. 13-16; 7. 185; 8. 115.

⁹⁶ Harrison 1912; West 1919; Bradeen 1952; Zahrnt 1971.

⁹⁷ Hdt. 1.57.

⁹⁸ The earlier dates suggested once for the appearance of the coins of the tribes in South-Western Thrace (cf. for example Raymond 1953: 43) have now been corrected on the basis of the dating of the big Asiut hoard from Egypt (480/475 B.C., cf. Price, Waggoner 1975: 117 et passim).

⁹⁹ Fol 1972: 94-95; Kraay 1976: 139.

and gold in the Pangaeus area should also be dated to at least the middle of the 6th c. B.C. when Peisistratus received his concession there.¹⁰⁰

The identification and geographical location of some of the tribes known from the coin legends remain major problems in the numismatic studies. The *Edoni*¹⁰¹ and the *Bisaltae*¹⁰² who are well represented in the literary tradition are in fact the only two tribes which have been identified with certainty and have a more or less unquestionable and established territory. The tribes of the *Orrescii* and of the *Derroni* are known only by the inscriptions on their coins, which however represent two of the most important tribal coinages in the region. The *Orrescii* have often been placed provisionally in the eastern part of the Pangaeus region on the basis of the analogies of their coins with the types of the *Edoni* and of the island of Thasos.¹⁰³ There are different suggestions about the location of the *Derroni*, whose name appears on the heaviest coins of the whole group. The old idea placing them on the Sitionian Peninsula on the ground of the phonetic similarity between their name and that of the town of Torone/Terone seems now quite difficult to sustain.¹⁰⁴ The appearance of the epithet *Derroniaios* on the coins of the Paeonian king Lykkeios in the 4th c. B.C. has induced many authors to send the *Derroni* to the northern area of Krestonia in the deep hinterland of the Chalcidic Peninsula, ascribing to them the early control over the silver mines in the mountain Dizoron.¹⁰⁵ A third opinion puts them in the region of the Pangaeian silver mines and suggests, on the basis of the phonetic similarity of the names, their identification with the *Dersaei* placed by Herodotus between the *Sapaei* and the *Edoni*,¹⁰⁶ this hypothesis however leaves no room for the *Orrescii* who are often ascribed the same territory. The absence of the late emissions of the *Derroni* (with triskeles in place of the incuse square on the reverse) and of the octadrachms of the *Bisaltae*, *Edoni*, and *Orrescii* from the Asiut hoard suggests their dating after 480/475 B.C.¹⁰⁷ and this adds a new aspect to the problem of their localization. The *Derroni* and *Bisaltae* obviously must have retained their access to rich sources of silver in the 70's and the 60's of the 5th century when, according to the literary sources, the Macedonian king Alexander I had already established control over the silver mines in Dizoron.¹⁰⁸

Among the remaining tribal coinages were those of the *Ichnaei*, *Tynteni*, *Letaei*, *Dionysii*, *Zeeli*, and a considerable number of anepigraphic coins or such with unreadable or abbreviated legends whose interpretation remains quite uncertain.¹⁰⁹ Some authors have ascribed the coins of the *Ichnaei*, *Tynteni*, and *Letaei* respectively to the towns of *Ichnae*,¹¹⁰ *Tynde*¹¹¹ and *Lete*¹¹² in the Axios valley, considering them city and not tribal coinages. The similarity of the coin types of the *Ichnaei* and *Tynteni* to those of the *Edoni* and *Orrescii* (a male figure with two bulls on the obverse, and a four spoke wheel on the reverse), and of those of the *Letaei* to the coins of Thasos and their Thracian imitations (Silenus and nymph/incuse square) suggests alternatively a possible localization of these tribes further eastwards, in the Pangaeus area.

The problem becomes even more complicated if we take into account the fact that many of the tribes whose presence in the region is well attested in the literary sources, and some of which according to the ancient authors participated actively in the mining of precious metals in the Pangaeus, have not left any identifiable coinages at all. Among these are the *Sapaei*, the *Odomanti*, the *Satrae*, the *Pieres*, the *Dersaei*, etc. A possible explanation can be found in the suggestion that these tribes had

¹⁰⁰ Borza 1990: 116-117; Cole 1975.

¹⁰¹ On the *Edoni* cf. Fol 1972: 104 – 106. The inscribed coins of the *Edoni* were struck in the name of king *Getas*.

¹⁰² On the *Bisalti* cf. Fol 1972: 101-104.

¹⁰³ Kraay 1976: 139; Yurukova 1992: 16.

¹⁰⁴ Katsarov 1922: 7. The location of the *Sithones* on the peninsula seems much more likely; cf. on them Detschew 1976: 441-442.

¹⁰⁵ Yurukova 1992: 12 with lit.

¹⁰⁶ Hdt. 7. 110; cf. Detschew 1976: 120, 128.

¹⁰⁷ Kraay 1976: 141.3.

¹⁰⁸ Hdt. 5. 17; cf. Thuc. 2. 99. 4-6.

¹⁰⁹ Svoronos 1919 remains the most exhaustive study of this materials; his attributions however are in many cases unreasonable and unreliable.

¹¹⁰ Papazoglou 1988: 154-156.

¹¹¹ Zahrnt 1971: 247.

¹¹² Papazoglou 1988: 154-156.

remained out of the zone of direct Persian hegemony, and consequently had no obligation to pay the heavy taxes which are considered by some authorities as the main impulse for the striking of the known coin emissions in the region, neither were they involved in the sphere of the Persian trade.¹¹³ An alternative solution is offered by the assumption that the same tribes might have been mentioned with different names on the coins and in the literary tradition, although all suggested identifications of this type remain purely hypothetical. On the whole, as has been mentioned already, the ethnic picture of the region remains quite obscure and retains many unsolved problems and puzzles.

The relatively high stage of development of the tribes in the region of the lower Axios, Strymon and Nestos is confirmed furthermore by the evidence on the development of royal power at a tribal level in the age in question (6th – 5th c. B.C.). *Getas*¹¹⁴ and *Pitakos*¹¹⁵ by the Edoni, *Poles*¹¹⁶ by the Odomanti, *Naris*¹¹⁷ and probably *Moses* who is known only from his coins¹¹⁸ by the Bisaltae, *Oloros* the father-in-law of Miltiades the Younger¹¹⁹ whose tribal affiliation is difficult to establish, are among the names which have survived in the coin legends or in the scarce and casual remarks of the written sources, and they all clearly characterize the general phenomenon.¹²⁰ Some modern authors have suggested the existence of a kind of tribal union or confederation, if only a loose one, which would have united the tribes of the region about the age of the Persian invasion; the hypothesis was inspired mainly by the considerable similarities and many common elements in the tribal coinages.¹²¹ A slightly different conception results from the idea of a certain system of inter-tribal regulation and organization of the mining of precious metals and of the coinage; this has not been investigated thoroughly, but seems quite reasonable and working. In any case the active metal production in the region, and especially the mining of gold and silver, seem certainly to have been among the major factors for the early and considerable economic, political and cultural progress of the local population. In all likelihood, the early production of metals was not limited only to the famous mines of Pangaeus and Dizoron which are overexposed in the literary tradition. Whether (and to what extent) this major factor functioned in the Middle Mesta valley, remains an open question, the answer to which might be provided only by future investigations.

II.1.4. THE ODRYSIAN KINGDOM

The Middle Mesta area has not so far been placed in any direct relation with the Odryian Kingdom.¹²² The possibilities to raise this argument come from the interpretation of two rather vague episodes of Odryian political history – the activity of Sparadokos in the middle of the 5th century and that of Berisades and his sons led by Ketriporis in the middle of the 4th c. B.C.

The personality of *Sparadokos* is quite enigmatic. It is known with certainty that he was a son of Teres, the founder of the “Great” Odryian Kingdom, a brother of Sitalces who ruled in the thirties and twenties of the 5th c. B.C., and the father of Seuthes I who ascended the throne in 424 B.C. He was also the first Odryian who minted in his own name silver coins of several denominations, including tetradrachms, which are associated with the early coinages of the tribes in South-Western Thrace, of the Greek colonies in the region and of the Macedonian king Alexander I.¹²³ These coins have given rise to the suggestion that Sparadokos, either as a king of the Odrysae after his father Teres and before his brother Sitalces, or as a “paradynast” in the reign of the one or of the other, controlled at least par-

¹¹³ Fol 1972: 98.

¹¹⁴ Head: 1911 : 201.

¹¹⁵ Thuc. 4. 107.

¹¹⁶ Thuc. 5.6.2.

¹¹⁷ Athen. 12. 520 d-e.

¹¹⁸ Head 1911: 200.

¹¹⁹ Hdt. 6. 39, 41.

¹²⁰ Cp. Fol 1972: 86-106.

¹²¹ Raymond 1953: 43 ff.; Zlatkovskaya 1971: 187-188; Fol 1972: 96-97.

¹²² On the Odryian Kingdom cf. Fol 1972: 115-154; Fol 1975: 93-195; Archibald 1998.

¹²³ On the coinage of *Sparadokos* cf. Yurukova 1992: 36-42, 218-223. The numismatic literature accepts the opinion associating the striking of Sparadokos' coins with the mint of Olynthus in the south-western part of the Chalcidic Peninsula.

tially the silver producing region around the Lower Strymon with the rich mines in the mountains Pangaeus and Dizoron.¹²⁴

Thucydides places Abdera at the end of Odrysian political territory during the reign of Sitalces,¹²⁵ and modern historians have usually considered this information as indicating the imposition of Odrysian power over the coastal region from the mouth of the Hebros to that of Nestos in the west.¹²⁶ Since the literary sources do not offer any direct information on the question, there seems however to be an alternative possibility – that the penetration of the Odrysaes into the region around Abdera was achieved through the direct road by the western Rhodopes and the Nestos valley,¹²⁷ in very similar manner to that of Sitalces into the Upper Strymon valley which is described in some detail by Thucydides,¹²⁸ and starting from the same area – the Upper Hebros Valley. It should be reminded that Thucydides himself in describing the territory of the Odrysian kingdom, mentioned the existence of a land road “from Abdera to Istros”, which could be covered in eleven days by a good walker.¹²⁹

Berisades made a fleeting appearance on the historical scene in the critical period after the murder of Cotys I in 360 B.C. His origin is uncertain, and so are the reasons for his claim to a part of the political heritage of Cotys. In open dispute with Kersebleptes the son of Cotys and with Amadocos (whom modern scholars usually affiliate to the Odrysian dynasty, though the supported stemmas are different), Berisades imposed his rule over a part of the territories controlled by the Odrysaes; the support of the Greek mercenary commander Athenodoros was of vital importance for the success of his secession. In 357 B.C. Kersebleptes, Amadocos and Berisades were forced by Athens into a common treaty which formally sanctioned the division of the Odrysian Kingdom; Berisades received the westernmost territories, including the coastal area around the lower Nestos and Strymon.¹³⁰ His subsequent disappearance from the literary sources has usually been linked with the invasion of Philip II into the coastal region, which could hardly have happened without a military conflict. In 357 B.C. Philip conquered Amphipolis on the Strymon, and in 356 B.C. he re-colonized and fortified Philippi in the plain of Drama north-east of Pangaeus.¹³¹ Berisades was succeeded about that time by his sons lead by Ketriporis; in the anti-Macedonian treaty of 356 B.C. with the Paeonian king Likkeios and the Illyrian king Grabos which was fashioned with the active participation of Athens they are officially mentioned as “Ketriporis and his brothers”.¹³² After this fleeting display the sons of Berisades disappear too from the written sources, but the coinage of Ketriporis¹³³ and the imposing of his name over part of the dependant territories (“Kedriopolis”)¹³⁴ are usually considered to imply that the reign of the brothers was not liquidated immediately and completely.¹³⁵ And since the coastal region had now fallen firmly into the hands of the ambitious Macedonian king, the remaining territories ruled formerly by Berisades and now by Ketriporis should be sought for further into the interior and most likely due north in the valley of the Nestos, but possibly also through this and the Western Rhodopes into the westernmost areas the Upper Hebros Valley. A suggested reading of the place name *Ketripara* in a 1st c. A.D. inscription from the Nevrokop (Gotse Delchev) region would be a proof in support of this idea.¹³⁶ A fragmentary inscription from Batkun in the region of Pazardjik might also be related with Ketriporis; the preserved part of the text mentions honours conferred by an unknown Greek city to an unknown

¹²⁴ Tacheva 1990. On the basis of the suggestion that Sparadokos took part in the defeat of the Athenian colonists at Drabeskos in 464 B.C., M. Tacheva relates his presence in the region of Lower Struma between 464 and 444 B.C.

¹²⁵ Thuc. 2. 97. 1.

¹²⁶ For example Fol 1972: 142-145.

¹²⁷ About this road cf. *Chapter II.5 infra*.

¹²⁸ Thuc. II.96.3, 98.1.

¹²⁹ Thuc. II. 97.1.

¹³⁰ Tonev 1942: 197-199; Fol 1972: 113-115; Delev 1997: 8-11.

¹³¹ Diod. 16.8.2-3, 6-7.

¹³² Dittenberger 1915: no. 196; Diod. 16.22.3.

¹³³ Yurukova 1992: 68-70; 244.

¹³⁴ Detschew 1976: 243.

¹³⁵ Dittenberger 1879; Tonev 1942: 198.

¹³⁶ Mihailov 1966: 2338; cf. Detschew 1976: 238.

Thracian ruler *and his brothers*; the paleographical peculiarities of the inscription point to a date before the time of Alexander the Great.¹³⁷

These rather vague and indefinite pieces of evidence provide the reasons to suggest tentatively the possibility that Odrysian control might have been imposed over the road leading through the Western Rhodopes and the Nevrokop basin to the Aegean coast in the period between the middle of the 5th and the middle of the 4th c. B.C. Only future archaeological excavations in the region, new numismatic data or a fortunate epigraphical find could eventually throw more light into this obscure problem.

II.1.5. THE MACEDONIAN EXPANSION

During the 5th and the 4th c. B.C. South-Western Thrace was experiencing an aggressive pressure from the west, which ended with its political integration in the Argead Kingdom of Macedonia. In the 6th century the expansion of the Macedonian political territory in a north-eastern direction had extended to the lower course of the Axios (Vardar) and may even have reached over it to the nearby territories of Amphaxitis and Anthemous. The problem, which was usually discussed in the light of the dubious interpretation of the scarce written evidence, has been resuscitated by the recent excavations of the amazingly rich necropolises at *Agia Paraskevi* south-east of Thessaloniki (6th c. B.C.) and at *Sindos* north-west of Thessaloniki (end of the 6th – beginning of the 5th c. B.C.).¹³⁸ After the Persians were expelled from Europe, in the seventies of the 5th c. B.C. Alexander I took advantage of the political vacuum in the area (which might have been reinforced by the temporary withdrawal of a part of the Thracian population¹³⁹), invaded the deep hinterland of the Chalcidic Peninsula (Mygdonia, Crestonia and Bisaltia) and reached in the east as far as the Strymon valley, taking possession of the rich silver mines in the Dizoron mountain.¹⁴⁰ The incomes from the newly acquired silver mines (according to Herodotus Alexander obtained from them one talent of silver per day) enabled the Macedonian king to begin his sumptuous coinage.¹⁴¹

It seems however that later on the Macedonian expansion in the region met with some reverses at the expense of the activated position of Athens (and later Sparta), of the local Thracian tribes, of the Chalcidians united under the domination of Olynthus, and of the Odrysian Kingdom in Thrace. It was only in the middle of the 4th c. B.C. that the strengthening of Macedonia under Philip II made possible a renewal of the eastern aggression. The conquest and re-colonization of Amphipolis (in 357 B.C.) and of Philippi (in 356 B.C.) enabled Philip to settle permanently in the region of the Lower Strymon and Mount Pangaeus, establishing his control over the gold and silver mines. The vicissitudes of the following stages of Philip's aggression in Thrace, which ended with the establishment of his authority over most of the main territories of the Odrysian Kingdom, have been repeatedly discussed in the scientific literature.¹⁴² The lack of details in the extant sources prevents any reasonable assessment of the involvement of the Middle Mesta region in the repeated and often large scale military campaigns of the age. It seems perfectly plausible for Philip to have used the old road across the Mesta and the Western Rhodopes during the great Thracian war of 342 – 340 B.C., but this cannot be established with certainty; the establishment of the Macedonian colony in Philippopolis (Plovdiv) however would have justified an attempt to establish firm control over the direct roads towards the Upper Hebrus Valley. Some vague passages mention the activity of Philip's commanders Antipater and Parmenio against the Tetrachoritae presumably in the Rhodopes at the time of Philip's siege of Perinthus and Byzantium in 340 – 339 B.C.¹⁴³ The limited results of these actions however are made clear by the explicit text of Arrian about the campaign of Alexander the Great in 335 B.C.: having passed by Philippi and the mountain Orbelos and crossed the Nestos (presumably going along the old road

¹³⁷ Mihailov 1961: 1114.

¹³⁸ Hammond, Griffith 1979: 53-58; Hammond 1989: 43; Borza 1990: 88-89.

¹³⁹ According to Herodotus, at the time of Xerxes' campaign the Bisaltae and the Krestoni withdrew into the Rhodope mountains, Hdt. 8. 116.

¹⁴⁰ Thuc. 2. 99. 4-6; cf. Hammond 1989: 45-46; Borza 1990: 119.

¹⁴¹ Hdt. 5. 17. On the coinage of Alexander I cf. Kraay 1976: 142-143.

¹⁴² Delev 1997; Iordanov 1995; Iordanov 1996; Iordanov 1998: 27-58.

¹⁴³ Theopomp. F 217, 218; Polyæn. *strat.* 4.4.1.

through the Nevrokop valley and the Western Rhodopes), Alexander entered “the lands of the independent Thracians”.¹⁴⁴

During the Hellenistic Age the Middle Mesta region remained in the periphery of the Macedonian Kingdom, which had permanently turned the region around Pangaeus with the cities of Amphipolis and Philippi into part of its territory. The possible permanent or episodic interference of the Macedonian kingdom or of some of the Thracian dynasties (the Sapaean or the Odrysian one) in the life in the region in this age remains however absolutely hypothetical due to the lack of any specific information in the historical sources.

II.1.6. THE ROMAN EXPANSION

The name of the Bessi reappears continuously in the ancient tradition concerning the Roman expansion in Thrace in the 2nd and 1st c. B.C., attesting the considerable efforts the Romans had to undertake over a long period of time in order to penetrate the mountainous regions of Southern Thrace and to break down the stubborn resistance of the freedom-loving highland population. At the end of the 2nd c. B.C., after long wars in Thrace caused by the invasion of independent tribes into the territory controlled by the Romans, the proconsul of Macedonia Marcus Minucius Rufus won a big battle against the Skordisci, Bessi and other Thracian tribes near the frozen Hebros river, which brought him a triumph in 106 B.C.¹⁴⁵ Jordanes mentions some successful actions in the Rhodopes by the provincial governor Appius Claudius Pulcher who died in 76 B.C.¹⁴⁶ The Bessi were among the most renowned enemies of Marcus Terentius Varro Lucullus in his great campaign in 72-71 B.C.; some late sources (Eutropius, Eusebius) even ascribe his triumph after the successful proconsulate to the victory over the Bessi, but this is probably a result of the expanded usage of the ethnonym in their age.¹⁴⁷ In 60-59 B.C. “Bessi and Thracians” were defeated in a big battle by the proconsul of Macedonia Gaius Octavius, the father of the future emperor Augustus. Probably at the time of these events, Octavius also received an omen about the future majesty of his son in the Bessic sanctuary of Dionysos.¹⁴⁸ In 57 – 56 B.C. another governor of Macedonia, Lucius Calpurnius Piso, killed perfidiously the Bessic prince Rabo-centus who had come to his camp offering military support; according to the accusations of Cicero, Piso was bribed with 300 talents by the Odrysian king Cotys.¹⁴⁹ The Bessi seem to have taken an active part in the unrest which followed the death of the Odrysian king Sadalas in 42 B.C.; about this time they were in fight with Marcus Junius Brutus the murderer of Caesar and with his associate the Sapaean (?) dynast Rascuporis who later succeeded to the vacant Odrysian throne.¹⁵⁰ In 29 B.C., during his decisive campaign in Thrace, the proconsul Marcus Licinius Crassus gave the famous Bessic sanctuary of Dionysos over to the Odrysae,¹⁵¹ and this act excited the great anti-Roman uprising of the Bessi lead by the priest Vologaeses in the following decade.¹⁵²

The role of the Middle Mesta region in these dynamic and large-scale events remains absolutely vague. As one of the road entrances into the Rhodope mountains, already used for centuries also as a main route towards the interior parts of Thrace, it would have been affected probably repeatedly by the march of large armies, and perhaps even saw real military action. Although the coin hoards evidence active trade contacts (but also numerous occasions for hiding treasure), the inscription of Flavius Dizalas from Nicopolis ad Nestum reflects the results of the long invasions and devastation: in the second half of the 1st c. A.D. it commemorates the restoration of a desolate old sanctuary of Artemis near the Thracian settlement of Keirpara (Ketripara?).¹⁵³

¹⁴⁴ Arr. *anab.* 1.1.5.

¹⁴⁵ Dittenberger *Syll.*³ 710 for the Bessi. The remaining sources cf. in Tacheva 1997: 65-66, 76.

¹⁴⁶ Jordan. *rom.* 221.

¹⁴⁷ Tacheva 1997: 78-79 with the sources on p. 80.

¹⁴⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 3.2; 94.5-6.

¹⁴⁹ Cic. *in Pis.* 34.

¹⁵⁰ Cass. Dio 47. 25. 2; cf. Tacheva 1997: 71-72.

¹⁵¹ Cass. Dio 51. 25. 5.

¹⁵² Cass. Dio 54.34.

¹⁵³ Mihailov 1966: 2338. The tentative suggestion to identify Ketripara/Keirpara with the archaeological site near Koprivlen seems a plausible possibility; then the ritual pits excavated there would have to be referred to the old sanctuary of Artemis mentioned in the inscription.

The inscription of Flavius Dizalas is important also for another part of its preserved text: the dedicator who was a Thracian aristocrat refers to himself as the strategus of eight strategies all mentioned by name. The father of this Flavius Dizalas, an Ezbenis son of Amatocos, is mentioned as a strategus together with another thirty-two colleagues by appointment in the inscription from Topeiros dated in the age of Claudius.¹⁵⁴ Unfortunately we do not know whether any (and which?) of these strategies comprised the Middle Mesta valley. The question whether the region was bequeathed to the Odrysian Kingdom (within the frames of which the strategies, which were inherited later by the early provincial administration in Thrace, seem to have developed initially) at some stage of the Roman penetration and when exactly this could have happened, remains also a complete mystery.

II.1.6. THE ROMAN PROVINCE OF THRACE AND NICOPOLIS AD NESTUM

In A.D. 45 the autonomy of the tributary Odrysian Kingdom was suspended by the Roman authorities, and direct Roman control was imposed over the Thracian territories; this was based (just as the former Odrysian rule had been) on the conciliatory attitude of the local aristocracy. In the beginning the new Roman provincial administration made use of the system of the strategies inherited from the last period of the existence of the Odrysian Kingdom. In the 2nd c. A.D. the strategies were replaced by the newly established city territories; new cities were founded in the regions where no important settlements existed previously. *Nicopolis ad Nestum* must have been one of these new cities; its remains are still visible by the Zagrade quarter of the village of Gurmen situated in the north-eastern part of the Nevrokop valley.¹⁵⁵ The city was founded most likely in the time of emperor Trajan, as may be suggested on the basis of the legends on coins of the city which contain the epithet *Ulpia*.¹⁵⁶ The city territory of Nicopolis would have been centred on the fertile Nevrokop basin, but it comprised presumably also an indefinite (probably considerable) part of the surrounding mountains, and especially the Rhodopes; the alternative suggestion that the Nestos would have played here as in the coastal region the role of frontier between the provinces of Thrace and Macedonia, seems less plausible. In the latter case, the territories along the right bank of the river, including the ancient settlement near Koprivlen, would have belonged to Macedonia.¹⁵⁷ The suggested idea that of Nicopolis ad Nestum was established in the place of an older settlement has not been confirmed definitely by any archaeological materials.¹⁵⁸ The inscription of Flavius Dizalas which dates from Flavian times (i. e. before the presumable establishment of Nicopolis under Trajan) is said to have been found in the area of the city,¹⁵⁹ but it might easily have been brought there from another place. The hypothetical possibility to associate the sanctuary of Artemis at Keirpara (Ketripara?) mentioned in this inscription with the archaeological site near Koprivlen has already been mentioned above.

The foundation of Nicopolis ad Nestum in this distant border region of the province of Thrace should have been determined to some extent by the need of a city centre which to which the government of the Western Rhodopes could be entrusted; however the administrative affiliation of the highland region remains absolutely uncertain. It might further be suggested that the establishment of the city was connected with the need of stable control over the ancient road through the Nestos and the Rhodopes connecting the Aegean littoral with the Upper Hebros Valley.¹⁶⁰ The city life in Nicopolis during the Imperial Age is represented with little detail in a series of inscriptions in Greek containing very often local Thracian names¹⁶¹ and in the autonomous bronze coins minted at the end of the 2nd and at the beginning of the 3rd c. A.D.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁴ Lazaridis 1955: 238.

¹⁵⁵ On the remains of Nicopolis ad Nestum and the archaeological excavations of the ancient city cf. Chapter II.4.2 infra.

¹⁵⁶ ΟΥΛΠ ΝΙΚΟΠΟΛΕΩΣ ΠΡΟΣ ΜΕΣΤΩ.

¹⁵⁷ On the frontier between the provinces of Thrace and Macedonia cf. Gerov 1979: 212-240.

¹⁵⁸ Mihailov 1966: 285.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. no. 2338.

¹⁶⁰ About the road cf. Chapter II.5 infra.

¹⁶¹ Mihailov 1966: nos. 2335-2348; cf. Gerov 1961: 220-225.

¹⁶² Head 1911: 287.

II.2. THE MIDDLE MESTA REGION IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

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Since ancient times, the Middle Mesta region seems to have held a prominent position as a communications centre. The valley of the Mesta river linked it with the Aegean littoral, and a well-developed road network provided connection with the interior parts of Thrace and with Macedonia (both names are used here in accordance with the late antique and medieval geographical nomenclature). The road west to Melnik, and another one leading to Bansko, connected the region with the Struma river valley. The large and important Byzantine fortress of Tsepena and the Diagonal road from Belgrade to Constantinople were attainable via Dospat. Also by way of Dospat, the region had a connection with the old Roman road which crossed the Rhodopes, gaining Didymoteichon via the fortress of Povisd (probably near Smolyan)¹ and Kurdjali. Another line of communication lead in a southern direction via Xanthi, connecting the region with Perithereon (a fortress of considerable significance in the 14th century), Mosynopolis (Komotini), the entire Aegean littoral and the islands of Thasos and Samothrace.²

The Mesta river, which takes its sources (the Byala Mesta and the Cherna Mesta) in the Eastern Rila Mountains and runs through the whole region, has always been the main waterway here. Flowing south, it divides the Rila and Pirin Mountains from the Rhodopes. The river waters a fertile, though not vast valley. Strabo describes the Mesta as a border river between Thrace and Macedonia.³ The hydronym is generally considered of Thracian origin.⁴

So far as settlement life is concerned, the importance of the region is easily explained by its geographical position, which predetermined the appearance of many prosperous commercial centres, comprised in a well-organized church diocese. Unfortunately, the information of medieval authors about the region is insufficient and often vague, and for that reason there are many unclear points in its history.

A Roman colony founded in the time of the Emperor Trajan and known later as Nicopolis ad Nestum (Νικόπολις ἢ περὶ Νέστου) was the biggest settlement in the valley. It is mentioned by Claudius Ptolemaeus among the cities of inner Thrace.⁵ Dexippus tells an interesting story about the inhabitants Philippopolis, who took refuge in Nicopolis and settled there permanently when their own city was besieged by the Goths about the middle of the third century.⁶ In view of the relative proximity of the two cities and the greater security in the closed riverside region of Mesta, the story seems very likely.⁷

Late antique inscriptions from the city and its vicinity offer some evidence about its administration (ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος Νικοπολεϊτῶν)⁸ and about the religious biases of its inhabitants.⁹

The wars against the tribes coming from the north were arduous and long. Except for direct military counteraction, the policy of Constantinople staked much on enrolling allies, who were then settled along the border and in the interior of the Empire, the practice being aimed at their easier as-

¹ Gagova 1995: 256.

² Soustal 1991: 136.

³ Strabo 323.

⁴ Detschew 1980: 299-300, 329; Soustal 1991: 360.

⁵ Ptol. 353.

⁶ Dexip. 177.

⁷ Velkov 1977: 125, 256, 247.

⁸ Mihailov 1966: n. 2335.

⁹ Mihailov 1966: n. 2338, 2339, 2341, 2352.

simulation. The Middle Mesta region could not have remained beyond the reach of the Gothic incursions in the 4th century. The invaders raided the lands of the Empire almost untroubled, sacking everything in their way. The emperor Valens, who tried to oppose them, was defeated and died himself in the great battle at Hadrianopolis. As a result, the Goths dispersed all over Thrace.

The “*Synecdemus*” of Hierocles informs us that Nicopolis was a city in the province of Rhodope.¹⁰ Hence, it must have been under the ecclesiastical administration of Constantinople. The name of a city bishop in A. D. 431 is known: Polycarpus, who was born in Sexaginta Prista. He is mentioned in a document of the Patriarchate, which deals with a reshuffle of ecclesiastical seats and the appointing of bishops.¹¹ According to the diocesan lists of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate, from the 7th till the 9th century Nicopolis had the statute of autocephalous archbishopric within the diocese of Thrace.¹² Since the city name reads Νικόπολις τοῦ Βολεροῦ in a *notitia* dated to the 8th or 9th century,¹³ the region certainly belonged to the theme of Boleron. The advanced position of Nicopolis in the ecclesiastical hierarchy implies the existence of a certain number of churches and monasteries in its vicinity. The nearby Mount Papikion (Peperuda) is known to have gained great importance in the spiritual life of monks and hermits some time later. The Constantinopolitan patriarch Philotheus Coccin, who lived in the mid-14th century, explicitly states in his sermon dedicated to St. Gregorius Palama, that “since ancient times (πάλαι) Papikion, which lies between Thrace and Macedonia, is a sacred mount (ἅγιον ὄρος)”.¹⁴

The region is represented in a somewhat strange manner in the treatise “*De thematibus*” of Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Surprisingly, Nicopolis is listed there among the thirty-two cities of the province of Macedonia Prima, which was governed by a *consiliarius*, together with Thessalonica, Pella, Amphipolis, Beroea, Edessa, etc.¹⁵ Only five cities are mentioned within the limits of Thrace – a province also administered by a *consiliarius*. These are Klima Mestikon and Acontisma, Philippopolis, Beroea, and the islands of Thasos and Samothrace.¹⁶ Philippopolis is almost certainly Plovdiv but not Philippi, since Philippi is placed together with Seres in the province of Rhodope. Βερόνη ought to be identified with modern Stara Zagora, while the homonym Βέρροια (modern Ber) stands for a city in the province of Macedonia Prima. The question about Klima Mestikon and Acontisma is still open. Although explicitly stated in the text, the existence of such a city may not be taken for granted. Constantine Porphyrogenitus uses the term κλίμα elsewhere in his works to denote a particular zone or district: τὰ ἐννέα κλίματα τῆς Χαζαρίας – “the nine districts of Chazaria”.¹⁷ In fact, this is precisely the original Greek meaning of the word. The relation between κλίμα (“a district”) and ἀκόντισμα (“a spear throw”) is unclear. It is difficult to make out whether both words constitute a single place name or stand for two different geographical or administrative subjects. Since the discussed toponyms are not attested in other sources, no identification with any particular site or district can be suggested. On the whole, the royal writer – who is well-known for his archaizing inclinations – is of no great use in revealing the administrative and geographical division of the Empire in the 10th century.

In the following centuries, the region remained aside from the political events (or rather from the range of interest of their chroniclers – the Byzantine historians). Piecemeal informations about Nicopolis appear only in the Acts of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate. The documents prove that the city and its vicinity were incorporated at times in the bishopric of Seres, at others in that of Philippi.¹⁸ An interesting piece of information from 1365 points out that the archbishop of Maroneia was sent to fill a vacancy on the island of Thasos in the diocese of Nevrokopia (ἐπὶ τοῖς Νευροκοπίοις).¹⁹ It is out of doubt that the Nevrokop region and the islands remained closely bound to each other throughout

¹⁰ Hier. 635.

¹¹ Darrouzès 1984: n. 73.

¹² Darrouzès 1981: 19, 32, 45.

¹³ Darrouzès 1981: 32.

¹⁴ Tzamis 1985: 441.

¹⁵ Const. Porph. *de them.* 88.

¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷ Const. Porph. *de admin.* 64.

¹⁸ Darrouzès 1979: n. 2497; Hunger, Kresten 1981: 552-557.

¹⁹ Darrouzès 1979: 2497.

the history of Byzantium and maybe even later. The latest notice dates to Ottoman times and attests a change in the ecclesiastical statute of Nicopolis: the latter was already a metropolis known by both names of Nicopolis and Nevrokop (Νικοπόλεως ἤτοι Νευροκοπίου).²⁰

Though direct information is far from being sufficient, it is still possible to assess the overall significance of the Middle Mesta region in medieval times. It often remained aside from the major political and military events and consequently rarely attracted the attention of Byzantine authors. Nevertheless, the available evidence gives enough grounds to believe that the region sustained throughout its position as an important commercial, administrative and ecclesiastical centre.

²⁰ Darrouzès 1981: 505.

II.3. KOPRIVLEN AND THE MIDDLE MESTA VALLEY IN MODERN TIMES

A HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHICAL AND ECONOMIC DESCRIPTION

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II.3.1. THE NEVROKOP REGION –GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION, CLIMATE, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECONOMICS

The Middle Mesta valley and its administrative centre – the town of Nevrokop (from 1950: Gotse Delchev), lie at a distance of some 200 km from the capital of Bulgaria – Sofia, at 210 km from Plovdiv, and at 112 km from Blagoevgrad. The distance to the town of Drama in Greece is only 75 km, and to the Aegean Sea – 101 km. The region of Gotse Delchev includes 36 settlements in the Western Rhodopes and some other 21 situated on the flanks of the Pirin Mountain and along the right bank of the Mesta.¹

The area is a typical river valley stretching from northwest to southeast, surrounded by mountains and high hills on all sides. It is closed on the east by the western parts of the Rhodopes and on the west – by the abrupt flanks of Southern Pirin.² The Pirin ridge is extremely steep in the section between Gotse Delchev and Koprivlen, slanting at some 70 degrees, and reaching even 80 degrees around the village of Musomishte.³ The Gotse Delchev (or Nevrokop) basin ends in the south-east in a narrow gorge, which delimits the Rhodopes from Mount Bozdag. In the north, the 24 km long defile of Momina Klisura, about 200-300 m. deep and that much broad at the bottom, separates it from the Razlog basin.⁴

The Nevrokop basin is rather narrow, level and some 20-30 km long. It slants slightly towards the river and in southern direction. The land north of the town, near the village of Gospodintsi, is more undulating. There are no uplands within the basin. The flatland is most broad and level between the villages of Koprivlen and Dubnitsa, where the valley is about 8-10 km wide. It narrows to 1-2 km to the north and south, towards the defiles.⁵ The overall area of the basin amounts to 81 square km, its altitude is 540 m. above sea level.⁶

The specific relief has determined the insufficient development of the infrastructure and transport in the Middle Mesta valley. Connection with the nearby regions and the interior of the country is realised by means of several highland passes. Fifty years ago only one bus daily connected the town with the rest of the world. The road system within the basin is also less developed compared to the other parts of Bulgaria, again due to the peculiarities of relief.⁷ The state frontier with Greece, which has remained closed for a long time, the remoteness from railway communications (the nearest railway

¹ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 12-14, 52, 151.

² Pancheliev 1970: 17.

³ Kanev 1988: 61.

⁴ Bulgaria 1961: 341-342.

⁵ Kanev 1988: 60.

⁶ Beshkov 1934: 160.

⁷ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 80, 161.

station is 44 km away at Dobrinishte) and the lack of convenient connections with the Struma valley have affected in a most unfavourable manner the economic development of the region.⁸

However, the relative isolation of the area affords certain advantages as well. It has contributed to the early establishment of stable inner links and the cultural unification of the whole region. The varied relief and the altitude affect the climate in the region. The latter has been differently defined as either transitional-Mediterranean,⁹ sub-Mediterranean,¹⁰ or continental-Mediterranean.¹¹ Anyhow, all the authors are unanimous in describing the peculiarities of the regional climatic conditions: a rainy, warm winter, almost without snowfall; a hot, arid and sunny summer; small annual amplitude of air temperatures.¹²

Though revealing certain differences, the Mesta valley falls within the same climatic zone as those of Struma and Arda, the southern parts of the Maritsa and Tundja valleys, Mount Strandja and the Bulgarian Black Sea littoral.¹³ Because of its greater altitude (500-600 m. above sea-level), the Nevrokop basin is distinguished for a cooler summer and a colder winter compared to the river valley of Struma (only 150-200 m. above sea-level). On the other hand, it is somewhat lower than the Upper Mesta basin and the snow cover holds here for a shorter time than in Razlog and Bansko. The climatic conditions in the region of Nevrokop differ considerably from those in the temperate-continental climatic zone of Northern Bulgaria, which is characterized with a much more frigid winter. Compared to the Mediterranean climatic zone on the other hand, which is typical for Greece, the climate here is much less hot.¹⁴

The favourable temperature conditions in the Middle Mesta valley are due to the penetration of mild and warm Mediterranean air currents from the south; this affects the average winter temperatures, which are normally above zero degrees centigrade.¹⁵ The considerable mountain barriers, especially on the west, impede the penetration of cold air currents from the northwest and west, which are prevailing in South-Western Bulgaria. The Balkan Mountains and the Rhodopes provide further protection against the cold continental air masses coming from the north and northeast. However, the minimum winter temperature measured in Gotse Delchev is surprisingly low – 29,6 degrees below zero.¹⁶ This is due to temperature inversion, a winter phenomenon originating in the closed character of the basin, shut up as it is by narrow defiles to the north and south: the valley retains large masses of cold air, which cannot be evacuated easily downstream and which is even colder than the air high on the summits of the Pirin Mountain.¹⁷

The valley runs transversely to the main direction of atmospheric transportation from the west, and this accounts for the great number of calm days per year. The average wind speeds are also the lowest in Bulgaria – less than 5 m/s.¹⁸ The standard mean temperature in the area of Gotse Delchev stays above zero for 360 days, and above 15 degrees – for 144 days annually. The maximum summer temperatures often measure beyond 35 degrees centigrade.¹⁹ The sunshine duration measured in the Mesta valley both in summer and winter is also one of the longest in Bulgaria.²⁰

The Mesta river is the main hydrological feature of the basin. It is one of the big rivers in Bulgaria, with a total length of 273 km from its sources to the Mediterranean coast; some 126 km of this length are within Bulgarian territory.²¹ Its catchment area lies entirely in the mountainous region of the Rila, the Pirin and the Rhodopes, where the mean annual precipitation is very high. As a result the

⁸ Kiradjiev 1977: 95-96.

⁹ Dimitrov 1960: 130-131.

¹⁰ Dimitrov 1974: 241.

¹¹ Stanev 1991: 79.

¹² Velez 1990: 113.

¹³ Subev, Stanev 1959: 134.

¹⁴ Stanev 1991: 80-83.

¹⁵ Pancheliev 1970: 17.

¹⁶ Subev, Stanev 1959: 135-136, 152.

¹⁷ Pancheliev 1970: 18.

¹⁸ Velez 1990: 204.

¹⁹ Geografia 1982: 188-189.

²⁰ Lingova 1991: 113.

²¹ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 14.

Mesta is among the most affluent rivers in Bulgaria,²² ranking sixth by amount of water outflow after the Maritsa, the Struma, the Tundja, the Arda and the Iskar. The Mesta has got several important tributaries in its middle reaches. It used to be one of the clearest rivers in Bulgaria, until mining and industrial enterprises stirred up pollution in recent times.²³

Autumnal and vernal high waters and flooding are characteristic of the rivers in the transitional-Mediterranean climatic zone. The abundant precipitation in late autumn and winter and the quick thawing of the snow caused by the warm foehn winds call forth violent overflows of the river, especially typical in the vicinity of Gotse Delchev.²⁴ Floods have happened in other seasons as well. In the higher parts of the Rila and Pirin mountains the thawing of the snow starts only in summer, and this results in high flood waves in that season. Overflows along the course of the Mesta occur at the rate of about 3 to 6 times yearly. They are usually of short duration but dangerous.²⁵ In high water years the amount of water in the Mesta can treble and the river overflows its banks. This used to cause the loss of vast areas of arable land in the past. The river has created a rather broad bed in the valley, which often changed its outlines through the ages.²⁶ All this imposed the undertaking of special activities in order to regulate the riverbed. Between 1920 and 1963 working plans were drawn up for the construction of 19 km of dykes along the Middle Mesta south from Gotse Delchev and another 20 km of dykes along some of its tributaries as flood protection for over 1 000 hectares (2 500 acres) of arable land.²⁷ It was not until the last decades, however, that this idea was carried into effect.

The activity of the river has resulted in the accumulation of large alluvial deposits over the riverside terraces. The strip of alluvium along the Mesta is up to 7 km broad and from 6 to 20 m. thick.²⁸

The river is not the only cause of natural disaster inflicting economic losses and damage to the region. Devastating earthquakes are also a frequent phenomenon here. The intense wood-cutting and the extension of pasture-grounds have brought about deforestation and soil erosion on the slopes of the Pirin Mountain, the Rhodopes, Mount Sturgach and Mount Slavyanka (Ali Botush, Orvilos). As a result, mud torrents which heap up alluvial deposits and inflict considerable damage to settlements, arable fields, bridges etc. are often witnessed in the valley of Mesta.²⁹

In summertime the Mesta usually remains the only deep-water river in the area. Summer droughts are quite common, although not so frequent here as in the Struma, Maritsa and Tundja valleys or in neighbouring Greece.³⁰ The aridity in summer and autumn is favourable to viticulture, tobacco growing and the harvesting of the summer crops, but interferes to some degree with vegetable gardening, fruit growing and autumn ploughing.³¹

The maroon soils (light, ventilated and deficient in humus), the transient snow cover and the warm winter create optimum conditions for the cultivation of high-yielding thermophilic crops, which ripen here earlier than elsewhere.³² The shorter period of vegetation which is due to the earlier beginning of spring makes it possible to raise two harvests of different crops. The cultivation of olives and citrus fruits is however impeded by the considerable altitude and the sudden drops in temperature.³³

The region of Gotse Delchev is rich in various natural resources. The highland pastures provide feed for stockbreeding from early spring till late in the autumn.

The region is rich in forests and especially in coniferous ones, which form ten per cent of the coniferous woods in Bulgaria. White and black pine, fir and spruce are widely distributed, and from the deciduous species – oak, beech, hornbeam, chestnut, maple, sycamore and ash. It is hardly sur-

²² Bulgaria 1961: 19.

²³ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 44-47.

²⁴ Dimitrov 1974: 97.

²⁵ Ziapkov 1989: 218.

²⁶ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 44-47.

²⁷ Radoslavov 1963: 17, 21.

²⁸ Nenov, Blagoeva 1977: 24.

²⁹ Filipov et al. 1963: 151-152.

³⁰ Geografia 1981: 79.

³¹ Dimitrov 1974: 176-177.

³² Dimitrov 1960: 138.

³³ Dimitrov 1974: 243.

prising that timber industry and woodworking have been flourishing in the valley since ancient times. The waterway of the Mesta was used in the past for rafting down logs.³⁴

There is an abundance of building materials: granite, limestone, rhyolite. The sediments of the Mesta provide huge amounts of sand and gravel. The marble conglomerates found near Koprivlen, Hadjidimovo and Sadovo are a valuable decorative material. Pieces of marble coloured in different shades of snow-white, grey, red and pink are found in the vicinity of Gotse Delchev.³⁵ Small bits of differently coloured marble, limestone and quartz were used for the making of mosaics in the ancient city of Nicopolis ad Nestum.³⁶

Clays are widely distributed in the basin; they were utilised in antiquity and are still subject to industrial exploitation nowadays.³⁷

There are iron-ore deposits near the villages of Paril, the abandoned one at Lyalevo and De-bren. Chromium ores has been discovered near the village of Pletena.³⁸ The deposits of non-ferrous metals are poorly studied and less known in the region. Information is available about lead and zinc lodes near the villages of Obidim, Skrebatno and Paril,³⁹ while deposits of lignite coal have been found and are in exploitation by the village of Baldevo.

By virtue of the numerous thermal springs and its benign climate, the region is a well-known health resort. The contrasting climate, which combines the warmth of the valley with the cool and fresh mountain air of the Pirin and the Rhodopes, has a marked prophylactic effect. The conditions here are recommended for treatment of arthritic-rheumatic, chronic lung and nervous diseases.⁴⁰

II.3.2. THE NEVROKOP REGION – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The past of the region is rather dynamic and interesting. People of different ethnicity have lived here, imposing their peculiar customs and political systems – pre-Thracian and Thracian tribes, Romans, Slavs, Byzantines, Ottoman Turks, Bulgarians. From times immemorial they used to grow cereals, flax and hemp in the river valley; cotton was introduced much later.⁴¹

The history of the town and its vicinity fades back in the ages. The earliest preserved Ottoman documents mentioning the Nevrokop region date to the second half of the 15th century. They mention Nevrokop as the centre of a “*nahi*” – the smallest administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire. Representatives of the imperial administration, taxation and judicial officials resided in the town. A military garrison was also stationed there by the end of the 15th century. The town gradually rose to an important centre of craft industry.⁴²

The lack of sufficient amounts of fertile land and the remoteness of the region from the main military roads prevented the mass settlement of Muslim colonists: the latter gave preference to the richer and more urbanised regions in Thrace and the Aegean littoral.⁴³ However a restricted number of colonists settled in Nevrokop and some of the nearby villages.

In spite of its remote position, the Nevrokop *kaaza* (district) became the largest one in Macedonia, comprising 133 settlements. Goods from Austria-Hungary, Saxony and Britain were traded at the famous fairs held regularly in Nevrokop and Turlis. The export of the region was directed southwards – to Thessaloniki, Drama, Seres, and northwards – to Serbia and Austria-Hungary.⁴⁴ During the Bulgarian National Revival the valley maintained vigorous economic relations with the south, and cultural and spiritual ones with the north. Schoolteachers mostly came here from Pazardjik, while the young people from the region usually continued their education in Bansko.⁴⁵

³⁴ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 47-50.

³⁵ Nenov, Blagoeva 1977: 21-23.

³⁶ Georgiev 1987: 106.

³⁷ Nenov, Blagoeva 1977: 21.

³⁸ Iovchev 1961 a: 104, 122, 126.

³⁹ Iovchev 1961 b: 65.

⁴⁰ Ivanov et al. 1963: 8, 84, 91.

⁴¹ Kolev 1980: 76.

⁴² Dimitrov 1968: 70-74.

⁴³ Meliov 1988: 70.

⁴⁴ Markov 1988: 100.

⁴⁵ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 158.

The travelling masons from Kovachevitsa, Skrebatno, Ilinden and Gaytaninovo were well known for their skill during the Bulgarian National Revival. They used to earn their living carrying out building work all over the region of the Aegean littoral.⁴⁶ Nevrokop was a famous centre for the production of "*chans*" (bells for domestic animals). Leather industry also prospered in the town until 1923.⁴⁷

The region affords favourable conditions for the development of metallurgy: rich ore deposits, availability of coal and timber, abundance of water, suitable places with the requisite slant.⁴⁸ C. Jirecek relates Nevrokop to the biggest and most renowned Western Group of the old iron-production industry in Bulgarian lands; this group included the mines near Samokov, the silver ores of Mount Pangaion and the deposits in the valleys of the Struma and Mesta.⁴⁹

Iron-production was practised on a large scale in the mountainous area between the rivers of Mesta and Struma (the southern branch of the Pirin Mountains, Mount Sturgach, Mount Ali Botush, etc.). The region was known once by the name of "Murvashko" (from "*murva*" – cinder, coal dust). The appellation "*murvatsi*" (plural) with the meaning of "*people who melt ores and produce iron*" has spread over the whole population around the southern reaches of the Pirin Mountain.⁵⁰ There are a number of villages belonging to this population in the Nevrokop region: Musomishte, Lyaski, Teshovo, Gaytaninovo, Paril, Luki, Lovcha, Libyahovo, Belotintsi, Turlis, Starchishta, Zurnevo, Dolni Brodi, Karakioy etc.⁵¹

The ancient inhabitants of the region – the Thracians, were also engaged in metallurgy.⁵² Ancient mining has been attested near the village of Luki, where slag deposits contained pieces of pre-Roman pottery. The galleries near Gospodintsi and the iron slag accumulations at Teshovo, Musomishte and Debren also provide evidence of developed metallurgy in antiquity.⁵³ An ancient settlement, whose inhabitants must have worked the nearby mine, existed in the vicinity of the modern village of Paril.⁵⁴

Mining and metal-production in the Murvashko region were further promoted at the beginning of the 13th century with the invention of the device called "*samokov*". Saxon master-medallists arrived and settled here in the 14th century. It is presumed that the Thracians usually used open quarries to extract the ores, the Romans introduced the galleries, while the Saxons were the first to put into practice deep shafts going down beneath the level of subsoil water.⁵⁵ In 1347 the *murvak* village of Turlis was given to the Great Lavra monastery in Athos for the purpose of working the local ore deposits. The right-bank area of the Middle Mesta around the foothills of Mount Ali Botush became in the 17th-18th century one of the most thriving centres of iron-production in the Balkan Peninsula, surpassing in importance even Samokov. The Murvashko region ranged with the main suppliers of iron within the vast Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶ In the second half of the 19th century, the increasing influx of cheaper European iron put an end to this flourishing local metallurgy. The last *samokov* in the area (the one in the village of Teshovo) stopped working in 1916. That however was not the full end of local metallurgy: the exploitation of the iron mine near the village of Paril continued until 1961.⁵⁷

Panning for gold is also familiar in the Nevrokop region. It is a craft inherited from the past. The auriferous and argentiferous sand deposits along the lower reaches of the Mesta and Struma were well known in antiquity. The situation must have been the same upstream, in the Middle and Upper

⁴⁶ Moskov, Tsankov 1980: 203-204.

⁴⁷ Pancheliev 1968: 166-170.

⁴⁸ Ivanov 1996: 14.

⁴⁹ Jirecek 1899: 449-451.

⁵⁰ Ivanov 1996: 143.

⁵¹ Shopov 1893: 114.

⁵² Ivanov 1917: 4.

⁵³ Georgiev 1987: 98.

⁵⁴ Georgiev 1978: 6, 21.

⁵⁵ Georgiev 1987: 98.

⁵⁶ Georgiev 1953: 6, 21.

⁵⁷ Ivanov 1996: 14, 140.

Mesta areas. Gold panning has been practised in the vicinity of the village of Gurmen.⁵⁸ A gold deposit exploited from ancient times has been localised between the villages of Osikovo and Skrebatno.⁵⁹

The gold flakes are obtained by sifting the sand of such rivers and streams, which drag down granites and crystalline schists from the high mountains. All the operations are done manually and no special devices are needed. Therefore no ancient remains from these activities have survived, except for the stone troughs for gold panning discovered near the locality "Beshkovitsa", between the villages of Osikovo and Skrebatno.⁶⁰ The skills however have been preserved through the ages and panning for gold remained an important occupation for the inhabitants of certain villages, as for example Skrebatno and Baldevo. The local people were considered in the past great experts in gold extraction and have practised their skills in many other regions. Nevrokop, Razlog, Drama and Bansko were also important and renowned as goldsmith centres during the Bulgarian National Revival.⁶¹

The economic decline of the region began after the Crimean War (1853-1856). The importance of the fairs dropped, metallurgy almost ceased and trade deteriorated. The Russian-Turkish War (1877-1878), which brought liberation to a great part of the Bulgarian people, had a negative effect on the valley of Mesta. The Ottoman authorities increased the taxation and the administrative burdens of the population.⁶² The artificial border with Bulgaria in the north hindered the development of trade relations.

The Nevrokop region suffered other blows as well. By the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century the phylloxera destroyed the local vine plantations. Their subsequent replacement with American vines inevitably took much time and resources.⁶³

The wars of the Balkan countries against the Ottoman Empire in the beginning of the 20th century resulted in an economic deterioration of the region, mass displacement of population and long-lasting administrative incertitude.⁶⁴ A new period in the economic development of the area set in about that time. Fruit growing and viticulture gradually gained much greater popularity. From the beginning of the 20th century, the cultivation of tobacco, potatoes, beans, cabbage, carrots and aubergines was introduced in the lowlands of the Mesta valley, while potatoes and oats were grown in the higher parts of the region.⁶⁵

Nevrokop was declared a district centre and a military garrison was stationed in it. New town quarters were erected. The resettlement of refugees from the Aegean littoral increased the population of the town by the end of the 20s. Since most of the newcomers traditionally had earned their living by tobacco growing, that predetermined a new trend in the economic development of the region.⁶⁶

The arable land per head of the population is less in the region of Gotse Delchev than anywhere else in Bulgaria. It is a region of smallest-scale farming. This explains the absence of cereals and pulses, which moreover do not give high yields here. As a matter of fact, the entire Pirin region is highly dependent on the import of cereals from other parts of Bulgaria. The small amount of arable land, the predominant small-scale farming and the specific climatic and soil conditions have set the pattern for the agricultural development of the region in the first half of the 20th century. Thermophilic industrial and oil yielding crops, mulberry-trees, fruits and vines were chiefly cultivated here. The basic branch of agriculture however became tobacco growing, which was high yielding and engaged the spare labour force. The local tobacco brand called "Nevrokopska basma" is renowned for its quality.

Although the region was rich in forests and pastures, stockbreeding remained poorly developed. The abundant mineral resources were not used adequately either. Industry was almost missing, and with regard to transport the basin remained isolated, having been cut off from its natural outlet to the Mediterranean.

⁵⁸ Georgiev 1987: 20, 78.

⁵⁹ This information was kindly provided by the international company MINORCO.

⁶⁰ Now examples of those ancient appliances are kept in the Historical Museum in Gotse Delchev.

⁶¹ Bonchev 1920: 4, 34, 44, 45.

⁶² Pandev 1988: 156, 164.

⁶³ Geografia 1981: 298.

⁶⁴ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 60.

⁶⁵ Bulgaria 1961: 342.

⁶⁶ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 89.

In the 30s of the 20th century the region ranked last in Bulgaria in respect of agrotechnics. The agriculture was of an extensive type. More lands were left fallow here in comparison with other regions, and no agricultural machines at all were in use.⁶⁷

II.3.3. KOPRIVLEN

The modern village of Koprivlen is situated at the foot of the Pirin Mountain, 10 km south-east from the town of Gotse Delchev. Its location has been specially chosen. The natural advantages of the site were estimated already by the earliest population of the region. Judging from the archaeological remains, the vicinity of the village was inhabited in the Bronze Age,⁶⁸ in Thracian times,⁶⁹ in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁷⁰ The village is surrounded by fertile lands, which are far enough from the Mesta to avoid flooding in time of river overflows. The steep heights of Eastern Pirin rise in the immediate vicinity of the village, affording a good opportunity for evacuation and defence in case of attack.

The name "Koprivlen" is first mentioned in a document dating from 1366, when the possession of the village was ceded by the despot Ioan Uglesha to an Athos monastery. The name is of Slavonic origin and probably derives from the word "*kopriva*" (nettles).⁷¹ Koprivlen is not among the known centres of recent metallurgy in the Murvashko region, although it is situated in the close vicinity of some of these – Lyaski, Musomishte, Teshovo, Paril, Gaytaninovo, etc. Since all the necessary conditions are at hand, it seems only too probable that metallurgy and metal-working were practised in the past also here. The pieces of iron slag found in Thracian ritual pits during the archaeological excavations support this statement.⁷² An old mine still functioned until recently some 2.5 km south-west from Koprivlen, and an iron mine of open type exists some 7 km west from the village.⁷³ A similar mine is situated on the slopes of the nearby mountain top called "Lyaskovski vrh"; although the ore contains a high percentage of iron, it is not worked at present because of the high transport expenses.⁷⁴ The deposits of marble in the immediate vicinity of Koprivlen are also well-known.

In spite of its Slavonic name, by the end of the 19th century the population of the village consisted mainly of Turks. The eminent Bulgarian historian and geographer Vasil Kunchov suggests that the Turkish population was settled along the Middle Mesta and in Nevrokop at the time of the Ottoman conquest.⁷⁵ That explains why the name of Koprivlen is not mentioned in the Ottoman taxation registers from the 15th and 16th century: as a rule they listed only the main taxpayers – the Christians.

The history of the village is eventful. In 1913 it was burnt by the advancing Greek troops. Although the Turkish population later returned, the village gradually acquired a Bulgarian appearance. This was due to the numerous Bulgarian refugees from Aegean Thrace and Aegean Macedonia, who were settled here in the period from 1913 to 1925.⁷⁶ In the early 1970s Koprivlen numbered some 1620 inhabitants and was a municipal centre. The Mesta and its tributaries generously water the village fields, which are among the best fertile lands in the valley. High-quality tobaccos, fruits and vegetables are cultivated here. The village also offers different products of animal husbandry. Together with neighbouring Gotse Delchev, Dubnitsa and Hadjidimovo, Koprivlen is also a well-known centre of tobacco growing.⁷⁷

⁶⁷ Beshkov 1934: 23, 163-170.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Chapter III* infra.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Chapter IV* infra.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Chapter V* infra.

⁷¹ Ivanov 1996: 29, 124.

⁷² Cf. *Chapter IV.3* and *Chapter VII.4* infra.

⁷³ Ivanov 1996: 93, 196.

⁷⁴ Pancheliev 1988: 13.

⁷⁵ Kunchov 1900: 58, 194.

⁷⁶ Ivanov 1996: 29, 193.

⁷⁷ Danilevski, Kiselov 1969: 77, 178.

II.4. AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE MIDDLE MESTA REGION

II.4.1. THE PREHISTORIC AND THRACIAN PERIODS

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II.4.1.1. Archaeological Investigations in the Area

The Gotse Delchev valley has been relatively scarcely and unsystematically investigated by archaeologists, most likely due to the fact that it is situated far from the larger modern towns, isolated between the Pirin mountain and the western flank of the Dubrash ridge which forms part of the Rhodopes. Until recently only chance finds suggested its exceptional importance as part of the Thracian lands.

It was such finds – the famous grave finds from Gorniyani (the present town of Hadjidimovo) and the helmet from Kovachevitsa – which provoked the interest of Vassil Mikov, the first archaeologist to explore the region. He undertook a limited investigation, collecting information mainly about the archaeological sites around Hadjidimovo, and published several stray finds from that area.¹ The tradition of collecting and publishing chance finds survived during the next decades. Archaeological excavations were undertaken at some Roman and Medieval sites,² but no investigations were aimed at providing a more complete picture of the development of the region in the period lasting to the end of the 1st millennium B.C.

Only in the 1970's did systematic investigations of the archaeological monuments in the valley of the Mesta river start at last as a consequence of the growing interest in the settlement system in the lands of the ancient Thracians and the cultural processes in the different historical periods. A research team of the "Mesta" expedition lead by Dr. M. Domaradzki made a detailed field survey and documented the archaeological sites along the left bank of the river. Trial excavations were undertaken at some of the sites (near Ablanitsa, Babiak, Vulkosel, Kochan, Osina, Pletena, Satovcha, Skrebatno, Tsruncha and Furgovo) in order to establish their character and chronology.³ A Thracian mound necropolis between the villages of Kochan and Satovcha was excavated at the same time.⁴ In the meantime, the registration of the archaeological monuments on the territory of the district of Blagoevgrad lead to the appearance of the first published general archaeological survey, which includes the Middle Mesta area.⁵

In the middle of the 1990's the implementation of a scientific project for the archaeological investigation of the Nevrokop basin permitted the renewal of the systematic field examinations in the region, including this time mainly the right bank of the river. The area of the settlements to the south

¹ Mikov 1927; Mikov 1937; Mikov 1938; Mikov 1950.

² Georgieva 1965; Vuzharova, Chacheva 1968; Cf. also the review in Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 3-14 and references.

³ Domaradzki et al. 1999.

⁴ Gergova 1980; Gergova, Angelova 1975; Gergova, Kulov 1977; Gergova, Kulov 1979; Gergova, Kulov 1982.

⁵ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987.

of Gotse Delchev was surveyed intensively and trial excavations were undertaken at a burial mound near the town of Hadjidimovo and at the antique site near the village of Koprivlen.⁶

While the first stage of the archaeological investigations, including the registration of Thracian archaeological sites, has already provided noteworthy results, the systematic archaeological excavations are only in their initial phase. The only site within the chronological limits of the period discussed here which has been investigated more thoroughly is the mound necropolis near Kochan and Satovcha, but even this has not been published in details yet.

The 1998-99 rescue excavations of the Thracian settlement near Koprivlen are so far the only systematic large-scale archaeological investigation in the region. The first results support the preliminary conclusions about the importance of this site as a regional Thracian centre and suggest the necessity of investigating the cultural environment in which the settlement existed and developed.

The field surveys of the teams working in the region during the last few decades permit some general conclusions about different components of the settlement system in the Gotse Delchev valley such as settlements, necropolises, sanctuaries, and about the tendencies in the development of this system during several successive periods (*Fig. 3*). In the present general review of the settlement system mainly the major sites documented in the course of the field surveys have been included. Certain problems result from the fact that no exact dating could be suggested for some of the established sites. Information provided by casual single finds from the area has also been included.

II.4.1.2. The Prehistoric Period

The earliest traces of human life in the Gotse Delchev area have been discovered along the river Kanina, where flint tools from the Early Paleolithic Age have been found.⁷

The Gotse Delchev valley was inhabited during the Late Neolithic Period. The settlements near Pletena⁸ and Gotse Delchev were inhabited in this age.⁹ Both continued into the Eneolithic Period when the number of the settlements increased – on the right bank of the Mesta river eneolithic materials have been found at the site Klisurata near the village of Ilinden,¹⁰ and on the left bank – near the villages of Ognyanovo,¹¹ Kovachevitsa,¹² Kochan,¹³ and Osina.¹⁴

The eneolithic settlements are not very big – 30 to 40 ares, and are situated in most cases on riverside terraces (Ognyanovo, Kovachevitsa, Osina) or on small detached hills (Zaimova Chuka by Kochan, Klisurata by Ilinden). The tell type of settlement has not been attested here. The greater number of settlements situated along the left bank of the Mesta river and along its tributaries up to the first slopes of the Rhodopes mountains is noticeable, and especially in the region along the river Kanina where the ancient settlers could have been attracted by the hot mineral springs. Some of the sites (Ilinden, Kochan) were inhabited during the subsequent historical periods too.

Without systematic archaeological excavations any comments on the stratigraphic sequence or the thickness of the cultural accumulations at the prehistoric sites in the area would be as superfluous as the attempts to trace their links with contemporary sites in other regions of the Balkan Peninsula.

II.4.1.3. The Thracian Period

No archaeological sites from the early stages of the Bronze Age have been found in the Gotse Delchev basin. This might be due to a break in the occupation of the valley or to insufficient investigations in the region. Traces of habitation in some parts of the valley evidence the reappearance of population in the Late Bronze Age. The evidence on different types of settlements, necropolises and

⁶ Unpublished field surveys of the research team led by Dr. A. Bozkova. All data concerning archaeological sites on the right bank of the Mesta in the text below is a result of these surveys. Their publishing is forthcoming.

⁷ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 17.

⁸ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 96, Site 3.

⁹ Serafimova 1988: 17.

¹⁰ Pancheliev 1992: 15; unpublished results of field surveys.

¹¹ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 94, Site 1.

¹² Domaradzki et al. 1999: 91, Site 5.

¹³ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 75, No 146; Domaradzki et al. 1999: 41-42, 92, Site 4.

¹⁴ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 95, Site 5.

sanctuaries permits a more detailed picture of the settlement system in the period including the second half of the 2nd and the whole 1st millennium B.C.

II.4.1.3.1. Settlements

During the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages the settlement system in the area was of comparatively low density. Late Bronze Age sites have been located near the villages of Ablanitsa, Brashten, Debren and Osina,¹⁵ and Early Iron Age ones near Ablanitsa, Vaklinovo, Valkosel, Zhizhevo, Krushevo, Pletena, Slashten on the left bank of the river¹⁶ and probably near Sadovo and Hadjidimovo on the right bank, where some materials suggest a dating in the second phase of the Early Iron Age.¹⁷ The finds from four other sites – near Brashten, Gorno Dryanovo, Debren and Skrebatno – do not permit to refer them definitely to either the Late Bronze or the Early Iron Age.¹⁸

The site located in the place Zaimova chuka to the south-east of the village of Kochan is of particular interest. The archaeological materials found on the plateau of a conical hill rising some 20 m. above the surrounding terrain and ranging from the Eneolithic and Late Bronze Ages to the Medieval Period witness continuous life at this place. An interesting fragment of an amphora-like vessel found there seems to be an imitation of Mycenaean ware from the Late Helladic III A-B period and suggests possible relations with Northern Greece and the lower Vardar where production centres for this type of pottery are known to have existed.¹⁹

The number of known settlements from the Late Iron Age is considerably greater. Fourteen new settlements on the left bank of the Mesta and another eleven on the right bank can be added to the mentioned ones near Vaklinovo, Valkosel, Zhizhevo, Kochan, Krushevo, Pletena, Slashten and Hadjidimovo, which seem to have continued their existence into this period. In most cases, life in these settlements continued in later Antiquity and the Middle Ages, which is the reason why the earlier cultural strata are usually seriously damaged.

From a geographical point of view, most of the settlements from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages are situated in the first mountain belt of the hill Dubrash and along the left tributaries of the Mesta river, away from the central river bed. Places with higher altitude seem to have been preferred. Settlements appear in the lower parts of the valley, near the river, only in the Late Iron Age, probably as a result of the increasing population of the valley.

Naturally defended places above rivers, on the ridges and slopes of the hills were preferred for the settlements.²⁰ The right bank of the Mesta river seems to have been less populated than the left one during the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. This picture changed considerably in the Late Iron Age when more settlements appeared along the right bank, near Hadjidimovo, Petrelik and along the river Mutnitsa.

Except for Zaimova Chuka near Kochan there seems to have been little topographical continuity between the Late Bronze and the Early Iron Ages. This fact authorises the suggestion that a new settlement system was created at the beginning of the Early Iron Age.²¹ This settlement system survived during the following periods of the Late Iron Age when life continued in the major settlements already established in the area.

The number of settlements gives some information about the demographic changes and the development of the settlement system. In contrast to the observations made in the valley of the Strumeshnitsa river which seems to have been less inhabited during the Early Iron Age than in the previous and following periods,²² the survey along the Mesta valley has provided information of five settlements with materials from the Late Bronze Age, ten – from the Early Iron Age and four with unidentified finds related to either one or the other. The fact shows a gradual increase of the number of

¹⁵ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 82, Site 1; 88 Site 6; 95, Site 4.

¹⁶ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 51, No. 54; Domaradzki et al. 1999: 83, Site 7; 85, Site 1; 90, Site 1; 92, Site 2; 100, Site 1.

¹⁷ Vulcheva et al. (in press).

¹⁸ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 84-85, Site 1; 87, Site 2; 88, Site 3; 99, Site 1.

¹⁹ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 10, 41-2, 92, Site 4, 135 Fig. V 5.

²⁰ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 9, 10.

²¹ Gergova 1990: 20

²² Gergova 1995: 34.

settlements (respectively of the overall population) and a move to a more compact settlement system.²³ This process can be traced into the Late Iron Age, when the settlement system reached its highest density. The simultaneous existence of groups of several settlements situated close to one another in this age, like the ones near Ablanitsa and Vulkosel, Pletena and Dolen, Petrelik, Sadovo and Hadjidimovo, suggests the appearance of specific systems of associated and mutually related settlements.

Without systematic archaeological excavations it is impossible to draw more detailed conclusions about the character of the sites and their position in the settlement system. Fortifications built of stones without mortar have been observed at the sites near Vaklinovo, Kochan, Ablanitsa and Vulkosel. However, since these places were inhabited during the whole 1st millennium B.C., it is impossible at the present stage of investigation to establish the date of their construction.

There is some evidence which suggests that at least a few of the sites could be interpreted as metallurgical centres. Pieces of iron slag have been found at almost all of the sites, but were markedly abundant at those by Dolen and Petrelik where iron melts were also present. Together with the presumably thin cultural accumulations these finds suggest that the two settlements were rather short-lived and belonged to iron-producing communities. As they are dated in the Late Iron Age, the question about the probable existence of earlier centres of metallurgy and metal-working remains open.

II.4.1.3.2. Necropolises

Both tumular and flat necropolises have been attested in the Gotse Delchev basin. As elements of the settlement system they can also provide some important information about the development of settlement life in the valley. Unfortunately it remains rather difficult to establish their chronology, since just a few have been excavated. So from the considerable number of necropolises registered in the area, only those with a certain or probable dating in the period examined here will be included in the analysis. At least some of the remaining necropolises must be related to the Roman Imperial period, to Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages.

II.4.1.3.2.1. Tumular Necropolises

Very few necropolises can be attributed indisputably to the Late Bronze Age. The burial under one of the thirteen tumuli excavated in the large necropolis between Kochan and Satovcha (tumulus No 7) is of Late Bronze Age date; the ritual was cremation and the bones were gathered in an urn.²⁴ Materials from this period have also been found in the embankment of some tumuli from the necropolises at Osina and Pletena, which allows to date them tentatively to the Late Bronze Age.²⁵

More information is available about the burial practices in the Early Iron Age and especially in its second stage. Seven of the tumuli excavated in the necropolis near Kochan and Satovcha (Nos 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, and 11) are from this period.²⁶ Situated on the ridge between the two villages, this necropolis comprises over one hundred mounds piled in different periods till the end of Antiquity; it illustrates in the best way the development of the various burial practices in the area. Single, double and collective graves were excavated in the necropolis and both inhumation and inurned cremation were used. In five of the Early Iron Age tumuli the central grave belonged to a woman and only in one case – to a man.²⁷ The burials in tumulus No 4 are particularly interesting. A rich female grave was found in the centre of the tumulus, above it were two male graves and a re-burial of a woman's bones; the mound was last used in the 1st c. B.C.²⁸ A double female burial discovered in tumulus No 2 was interpreted by the archaeologists as representing a specific aspect of Thracian religious beliefs.²⁹ The secondary burial of human bones (in tumuli Nos 2, 3, and 4) is among the interesting practices witnessed in the necropolis; it is still applied in our days in some parts of the Rhodopes. Other peculiar funerary practices displaying original aspects of the cult of the dead were the replacing of the bones with stones

²³ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 9.

²⁴ Gergova 1995: 34.

²⁵ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 11, 95, Site 4, 96, Site 5.

²⁶ Gergova 1980; Gergova 1995: 34.

²⁷ Gergova 1989: 238.

²⁸ Gergova 1989: 237.

²⁹ Gergova 1989: 238.

and partial burial.³⁰ The burial ritual was accompanied quite often by a fire as shown by the numerous remains of pyres in or near the centre of the mounds or at different levels in the embankments (tumuli Nos 2, 7, 8, 10).³¹ Some elements of the burial practices characteristic of this necropolis find parallels at Patele in the valley of Bistritsa (Haliacmon).³²

A spectacle-fibula and a bronze bracelet from Ribnovo published by V. Mikov³³ and dating from the 8th c. B.C.³⁴ probably come from a destroyed necropolis of small mounds. Two graves were discovered in a demolished mound south of Lyaski on the right bank of the Mesta; the one dates from the 8th or 7th c. B.C. (Gergova's stage IIa) and the other from the last decades of the 6th c. B.C.³⁵ The finds found in the embankment of one of the tumuli south of Sadovo suggest that it also belongs to this period.³⁶

In accordance with the increased number of settlements, the number of Late Iron Age mound necropolises in the area is also considerably greater. Necropolises were developing close to most of the settlements (Fig. 3). The necropolises near Kochan – Satovcha and Ribnovo continued to be used, as evidenced by the six torques found at Ribnovo. A secondary grave in the burial mound at Lyaski is dated in the Hellenistic Period.³⁷

A new type of burial construction – the monumental stone tombs – appeared in tumuli of the Hellenistic period. There is information about stone burial constructions in at least three mounds in the area south of Hadjidimovo, in the localities Kutubara, Tumbite and Zad Manastira.³⁸ Unfortunately, all these have been the object of unprofessional excavations since the beginning of the 20th century. According to the information of V. Mikov, rich grave finds were found by the excavators. Bronze, silver and ceramic vessels, silver and gold jewellery and an iron sword were reportedly found in the Kutubara mound and later confiscated by the then Turkish government. A bronze *situla* is said to have been found in the Zad Manastira tomb, and gold earrings in one of the mounds at Tumbite. In 1995 the authors of this volume re-excavated partially one of the two burial mounds at Tumbite and revealed the ruins of a destroyed hypogeum stone tomb. The architectural construction illustrates the links between South-Western Thrace and Hellenistic Macedonia.³⁹ Mound tombs have also been reported along the left bank of the Mesta, near the villages of Valkosel (a bronze helmet was allegedly found there)⁴⁰ and Dabnitsa,⁴¹ but there is no available information about their design and the type of construction.

The tumuli are usually situated at high places with good visibility such as the crests of the mountainous ridges; sometimes they are single, often in small groups or larger necropolises which could have been used for quite a long time. The number of tumuli registered on the right bank of the Mesta is smaller – about thirty,⁴² while more than eighty are known on the left bank even without the large mound necropolis at Kochan – Satovcha and the destroyed one at Ribnovo. Another conspicuous difference is that along the right bank of the river there are no large necropolises like the one at Kochan – Satovcha.⁴³

³⁰ Gergova 1989: 238.

³¹ Gergova 1989: 239.

³² Domaradzki et al. 1999: 12.

³³ Mikov 1938, 344; Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987, 105, No 257. Attention has already been drawn to the fact that the materials published by V. Mikov as a single find from Ribnovo – a spectacle fibula, a bronze bracelet and six bronze torques – belong in fact to two different chronological periods – the fibula and bracelet to the Early Iron Age and the torques to the Late Iron Age (Gergova 1987, 6; Domaradzki et al. 1999, 11). Domaradzki found no traces of burial mounds at Atkova plevnia, the alleged place of the find (Domaradzki et al. 1999, 97). The necropolis could have been destroyed by modern land cultivation.

³⁴ Gergova 1987: 53.

³⁵ Gergova 1987: 11f.

³⁶ Vulcheva et al. (in press).

³⁷ Gergova 1987: 11.

³⁸ Mikov 1937: 212; Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 127, № 332.

³⁹ Vulcheva et al. (in press); Cf. *Chapter I* infra.

⁴⁰ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 51, to No 53.

⁴¹ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 69.

⁴² Vulcheva et al. (in press).

⁴³ Vulcheva et al. (in press).

The size of the mounds varies between 0.80 and 9 m. in height and between 5 and 40 m. in diameter. The lower mounds consist of stones and ground and the higher ones usually only of ground. The embankments of all of the excavated mounds from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages at the necropolis of Kochan – Satovcha consist of stones and ground.⁴⁴ Many of the bigger mounds are situated in the lower parts of the valley, partly in the area around the Roman town of Nicopolis ad Nestum, and their piling might be referred presumably to the Imperial Period.⁴⁵

The systematic investigation of the necropolis at Kochan – Satovcha has furnished some more detailed information about the burial practices in the region. The burials rites included both cremation or inhumation and their simultaneous practice continued throughout the Early Iron Age, just like in other parts of Thrace.⁴⁶ Cremation is considered more typical of the earlier stage of the Early Iron Age, which suggests continuity from the Late Bronze Age.⁴⁷ During the second phase of the Early Iron Age inhumation seems to have prevailed.⁴⁸

The burial constructions also show some similarities between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages. Cremation burials *in situ* or in urns were practised in the Late Bronze Age.⁴⁹ Inurned cremations remained in use in the early phase of the Early Iron Age.⁵⁰ The greater variety of burial constructions is typical of the mounds from the second phase of the Early Iron Age, which contain pits, cist graves, graves surrounded with stones, and oval platforms,⁵¹ suggests significant changes at the end of the 9th and in the 8th c. B.C.⁵² These traditions were preserved in the Late Iron Age, when mound burials in urns appear often along the predominant cist graves.⁵³

II.4.1.3.2.2. Flat Necropolises

In addition to the mound necropolises, flat ones consisting of cist graves are also quite common in the Gotse Delchev basin. Cist grave constructions under tumuli were already usual in the Early Iron Age. The emergence of the large flat necropolises with cist graves in the region can be referred to the end of this period. A flat necropolis is situated in the vicinity of the settlement site from the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. at Pletena,⁵⁴ but its use during that period has not been attested with certainty. Judging by the Late Iron Age finds in the two graves excavated there, the whole necropolis might rather pertain to a later stage in the development of the settlement.⁵⁵ The case with a presumably Early Iron Age cist grave in the locality Tesnikola near Kochan is also ambiguous; it was defined as belonging to a necropolis of the Early Iron Age,⁵⁶ but a later field survey did not confirm this information.⁵⁷ The only flat necropolis certainly related to the Early Iron Age is situated near the village of Ilinden, on the right bank of the Mesta; it seems to have existed simultaneously with the settlement at Koprivlen during the Archaic Period (7th – 6th c. B.C.).

During the Late Iron Age flat necropolises were in use all over the region. They were situated near the settlements and, just like the burial mounds, usually on the crests of the nearby ridges. In many cases flat necropolises developed round one or several tumuli, for example at Drezhno near Ablanitsa,⁵⁸ at Lungurevi Tumbi near Vulkosel,⁵⁹ at Poseki near Pletena,⁶⁰ or at Borova Korja near Krushevo.⁶¹

⁴⁴ Gergova 1995: 34.

⁴⁵ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 13f.

⁴⁶ Gergova 1990: 21.

⁴⁷ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 12.

⁴⁸ Gergova 1990: 21.

⁴⁹ Gergova 1989: 233.

⁵⁰ Gergova 1989: 234.

⁵¹ Gergova 1989: 237; Gergova 1990: 21.

⁵² Domaradzki et al. 1999: 12.

⁵³ Stoianova-Serafimova 1981a: 211.

⁵⁴ Mikov 1927

⁵⁵ Zhuglev 1977.

⁵⁶ Stoianova-Serafimova 1975; Vasilev 1975.

⁵⁷ A bronze bracelet with rectangular cross-section, ends in the shape of lizards' heads, and decoration of relief ribs and engraved lines, was allegedly found in the same locality (Domaradzki et al. 1999, 92, Site 3).

⁵⁸ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 83, Site 6.

⁵⁹ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 85, Site 1.

Chance finds from the flat necropolis at Drezhno near Ablanitsa provide new information about Thracian culture in the region in the 4th and 3rd c. B.C.⁶² Some of the fibulae discovered in a female grave suggest parallels with Celtic ornaments of this kind. This might be explained with the influence of Celtic decorative art rather than with a real presence of Celts in the valley and would show the region's awareness of new cultural trends.⁶³

Quite a number of warrior burials have been found in cist graves in the Gotse Delchev valley. Most of these are concentrated along the left bank of the Mesta river, at Kovachevitsa,⁶⁴ Gorno Dryanovo,⁶⁵ Stanchovitsa⁶⁶ and Ilinden⁶⁷ near Pletena, and Debren.⁶⁸ Judging by a helmet found near Satovcha or Slashten, there was such a grave there too, but the information about the find is unfortunately not clear.⁶⁹ Only one warrior grave has been found so far on the right bank of the river near the village of Sredna.⁷⁰

These warrior graves are dated generally in the 5th and 4th c. B.C. (Kovachevitsa) and until the first half of the 3rd c. B.C. (Sredna). The grave goods found in them are not excessively rich, but they must have belonged to Thracians with a relatively high social status.⁷¹ The grave finds provide evidence for the reconstruction of the elements of Thracian warrior equipment. It usually included a helmet with cheek-pieces (bronze ones were found at Gorno Dryanovo, Debren, Kovachevitsa and at Ilinden near Pletena, and iron ones at Stanchovitsa near Pletena and at Sredna), several torques which seem to have been worn not so much as a sign of noble descent but mainly to protect the neck (two examples come from Gorno Dryanovo, one from Debren, two from Kovachevitsa, six from Pletena, and one fragment of an iron torque from Sredna), a cuirass (one example from Gorno Dryanovo), and greaves (a pair from Pletena). Long sword-spears (romphaeae) were found in graves at Gorno Dryanovo, Debren, Pletena and Sredna. The six torques from Ribnovo⁷² probably represent part of the finds from a similar grave.

Almost all of the helmets found in the area pertain to the so called "Thracian type". Only the helmet from Ilinden near Pletena shows some parallels with the Chalcidian type – arcs above the eyebrows, a nose-protector and a frontal.⁷³ Precise technological investigations of the helmets found in the region of the Rhodopes suggest a common model and warrants the definition of a local typological group.⁷⁴ The bronze and the iron helmets were produced simultaneously by the same specialized local metal workers who also repaired the armour damaged in the course of long use.⁷⁵ The iron helmets from Stanchovitsa near Pletena and from Sredna and the information about iron-extraction at some of the settlements imply the existence of local workshops for armour in the region (probably at Pletena).⁷⁶

The 4th c. B.C. grave from Hadjidimovo (former Gornyani) can be set apart from the standard warrior graves, and should be ranked rather among the rich graves of the age.⁷⁷ The Gornyani grave finds include a gold pectoral, a silver kantharos, a silver jug, a silver ring, an iron bridle-bit, gilded buttons, clay and bone objects, tetradrachms of Phillip II and a horse skeleton by the grave;⁷⁸ they

⁶⁰ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 97, Site 14.

⁶¹ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 92, Site 2.

⁶² Chacheva 1970: 301f.; Stoianova-Serafimova 1981a: 210.

⁶³ Stoianova-Serafimova 1981a: 211.

⁶⁴ Mikov 1927.

⁶⁵ Zhuglev 1977.

⁶⁶ Stoianova-Serafimova 1975; Vasilev 1975.

⁶⁷ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 95-96, Site 2.

⁶⁸ Zhuglev 1970; Domaradzki et al. 1999: 89 Site 16.

⁶⁹ Stoianova-Serafimova 1975; Zhuglev 1979; Vasilev 1980: note 13.

⁷⁰ Kulov 1990.

⁷¹ Domaradzki 1998: 28.

⁷² Mikov 1938: 345f.

⁷³ Vasilev 1980: 15.

⁷⁴ Vasilev 1980: 7.

⁷⁵ Vasilev 1980: 15.

⁷⁶ Stoianova-Serafimova 1975: 48.

⁷⁷ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 13.

⁷⁸ Mikov 1937: 207-212.

demonstrate explicitly the high social status of the deceased – most likely a representative of the ruling Thracian aristocracy.

Also in contrast with the cist graves, but in the opposite direction, are the much poorer Late Iron Age burials in urns or simple pits. Such graves have been discovered together with cist graves or in separate necropolises and probably display different modes of burial associated with the ordinary members of Thracian society.⁷⁹ In this way the funerary practices reflect clearly the social differentiation of Thracian society.

The review of the necropolises as part of the settlement system sheds some light on the gradual development of the latter. In comparison with the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, in the Late Iron Age the number of necropolises kept increasing proportionally to the increase in the number of settlements, and they are normally found together, the necropolises occupying usually an elevated and exposed position in the vicinity of the respective settlements. The mound necropolis at Kochan – Satovcha, which was used during a very long period of time, could be an exception to the rule, for no traces of any settlement whatsoever have been found in its vicinity; it has been suggested that this particular necropolis could reflect a different level of social organisation, based on a territorial, tribal or religious principle, which determined its central position in the whole region.⁸⁰

A specific concentration of at least six separate Late Iron Age necropolises has been observed around Pletena on the left bank of the Mesta. Two of the helmets mentioned above were found here. The facts confirm the importance of the Pletena settlement during that period.⁸¹ Another group of burial sites – a mound, a flat necropolis and a built tomb – have been registered near Vulkosel and should in all probability be linked with the settlement at the locality “Popa” where the handle of a column krater was found.⁸²

A most important settlement centre of the Early Hellenistic Period must have existed in the vicinity of Hadjidimovo on the right bank of the Mesta river, as can be judged by the rich burial finds from the area and the remains of monumental tomb architecture which are exceptional in this parts of ancient Thrace.

II.4.1.3.3. Cult Sites

A number of sites in the Gotse Delchev valley and on the slopes of the surrounding mountains have been interpreted as cult ones. Two such sites, at Osina⁸³ and Tsruncha,⁸⁴ were already in use during the Late Bronze Age according to the archaeological material; both however continued functioning during the following periods of the Early and Late Iron Age. A ritual pit complex seems to have existed near Hadjidimovo in the Early Iron Age.⁸⁵ The cult sites at Kovachevitsa⁸⁶ and Ilinden⁸⁷ can be dated generally in the 1st millennium B.C.

From a topographical point of view the sanctuaries are situated mostly in the mountains, and especially in the first mountain belt above the valley. At least in several cases they seem to have developed around distinctive rock formations (at Osina, Tsruncha, and Kovachevitsa). The cult site near Ilinden is located on a rocky cliff surrounded on three sides by the river Mutnitsa; the remains of a stone wall are still visible at some places.

The archaeological finds show that the cult sites were used during long periods of time. They seem to have been situated away from settlements and this might imply their functioning at a regional, multi-settlement level.

The pit sanctuaries have a different character. Two ritual pits dug below the level of the ancient terrain were discovered during the archaeological excavations of a large burial mound at Tumbite near Hadjidimovo. The archaeological materials in the pits were much older than the tumulus itself;

⁷⁹ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 14.

⁸⁰ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 12.

⁸¹ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 13.

⁸² Mladenova 1967: 15 ff.

⁸³ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 73-74, 95, Site 1.

⁸⁴ Domaradzki 1986b; Domaradzki et al. 1999: 101, Site 5.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Chapter I* supra.

⁸⁶ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 91 Site 2.

⁸⁷ Vulcheva et al. (in press).

their date in the later Early Iron Age coincides with the earlier materials from the Hadjidimovo settlement,⁸⁸ and this implies the existence of an early cult site associated with the settlement and situated at the place of the later mound necropolis.

More sanctuaries were discovered on the left bank of the river. The close proximity of the sanctuaries at Tsruncha and Osina and the Kochan – Satovcha necropolis suggests the existence of a specific cult and burial area in this part of the valley.⁸⁹ Another similar area might be suggested between Hadjidimovo and Ilinden on the right bank of the river.

II.4.1.4. Conclusions

The review of the elements of the settlement system permits some general conclusions about the development of settlement life in the Gotse Delchev valley.

The first settlements in the region were situated in the first ridges of the western slopes of Mount Dubrash. During the whole period discussed here, the concentration of sites here remained greatest. Only from the end of the Early Iron Age onwards did the settlements start to “move downwards” into the valley, increasing simultaneously in number. Even then hill sites like the one near Hadjidimovo were preferred. The inhabitants seem to have avoided intentionally the open spaces, looking for natural defence, but the selection of sites might have been connected with the peculiarities of their economy as well. The geographical factor should not be underestimated – the frequent floods of the Mesta were a very good reason for placing the settlements in higher places.

The greater density of the settlements on the left bank of the river is a noticeable fact. This might be due to the better natural conditions on this bank – the low and accessible slopes of the Western Rhodopes, crossed by the numerous tributaries of the Mesta river, are almost reaching its bed. On the opposite right bank the situation is different – the broad and flat valley between Gotse Delchev and Hadjidimovo is abruptly limited to the west by the almost vertical slopes of Pirin. Suitable settlement places existed in the valley of Mutnitsa, the only right tributary of the Mesta in the area; its middle and lower reaches run through lower mountain grounds where a concentration of archaeological sites has been noted.

Most of the sites – settlements, necropolises, sanctuaries – show a long period of occupation, and this could be taken to imply ethnical and religious continuity in the area.

From a demographic point of view, there seems to have been a continuous rise in population starting in the second stage of the Early Iron Age and increasing in the Late Iron Age when the settlement system was most densely packed. The tracing of this process has provided information on several areas which seem to have had some kind of leading, predominant position in one or another period. In the Late Bronze Age such an area is outlined around Osina, Tsruncha, Kochan and Satovcha. At least some of the sites there were related with cult and religious activities, and this seems to offer an explanation for the importance of this area, which remained pronounced in the following periods.

In the Late Iron Age areas of specific importance seem to have been established for economic as well as religious reasons. Metallurgy and metal-working must have become much more important for the local population,⁹⁰ and the large settlement sites at Pletena on the left bank of the Mesta and at Hadjidimovo on the right bank of the river should be considered in close relation to the neighbouring metallurgical centres near Dolen and Petrelik. Thus, two areas of regional importance can be established for this age – one between Pletena and Dolen and the other around Ilinden, Petrelik and Hadjidimovo in the valley of the river Mutnitsa. The importance of the area around Hadjidimovo is confirmed by the rich grave finds which illustrate its prosperity in the Early Hellenistic Period.

Another concentration of archaeological sites has been noted in the area around Ablanitsa and Valkosel on the left bank of the Mesta and Teplen on the opposite right bank. The river does not seem to have hampered the constant contacts among the settlements on its two sides in this area, and this idea is confirmed by the remains of a bridge (presumably of later date) at Valkosel.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Vulcheva et al. (in press).

⁸⁹ Gergova 1995: 38.

⁹⁰ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 32

⁹¹ Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 52, No. 56.

Besides the rich grave finds,⁹² the coin hoards from the Gotse Delchev basin also bear witness to the economic prosperity of the ancient population in the Late Iron Age. The coin circulation in the region shows the dynamics of the economical development in this period. The hoards from the vicinity of Gotse Delchev include early coins of Thasos, of the Orescii, and of the Thracian dynast Saratokos and should be connected with the Late Iron Age settlement on the site of the modern town.⁹³ A find from Skrebatno consisted of drachms of an anonymous Thracian tribe of the "Silenus abducting a nymph" type and tetroboli of Thasos.⁹⁴ The finds with tetradrachms of the Macedonian rulers Philip II (Ribново and Gospodintsi)⁹⁵ and Philip V and Perseus (Ablanitsa)⁹⁶ attest the links of the region with the Macedonian state. The increased coin circulation between the 3rd and 1st c. B.C. reflects the economic and political development of the region which became a zone of contacts between the Thracian lands and the Macedonian state, and later on with the Roman province Macedonia.⁹⁷

From the Late Bronze Age till the end of the first millennium B.C. the Gotse Delchev valley was developing as a part of the cultural zone of the North-Western Aegean. The imported ceramic vessels and the coins suggest the permanent relations of the Middle Nestos area with the North Aegean cities and with the coastal regions around Mount Pangaion, the Chalcidic peninsula and the lower Axios (Vardar). The excavations of the Thracian settlement near Koprivlen which are published in a preliminary form in this volume have confirmed beyond doubt this general affiliation of the area, providing at the same time an invaluable insight into the peculiarities of the local Thracian cultural development.

⁹² In addition to those mentioned above note also the two gold bracelets published by V. Mikov (Mikov 1950: 151-153) which probably come from a rich grave.

⁹³ Gerasimov 1950: 317; Gerasimov 1939; Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 58f., Nos 76, 77, 80; Domaradzki et al. 1999: 32.

⁹⁴ Gerasimov 1964: 240; Kolev, Slavcheva 1972.

⁹⁵ Mushmov 1921/22: 242; Gerasimov 1950: 321.

⁹⁶ Gerasimov 1940/42: 282.

⁹⁷ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 33.

II.4.2. THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD, LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

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II.4.2.1. Historical and Archaeological Investigations

Though rich in archaeological monuments, the Gotse Delchev region remained for a long time aside from the routes of travellers and annalists. The first to give some information about the Middle Mesta valley was Konstantin Jirecek in his book *"Travels in Bulgaria"* published in 1888. He identified incorrectly Nicopolis ad Nestum with Nevrokop (the present Gotse Delchev) mentioning the ruins at *"Gradishteto"* near the modern town. Jirecek also mentioned that the ancient city minted coins.¹

The information offered by V. Kanchov in his book *"Travel along the Valleys of the Struma, Mesta and Bregalnitsa"* is much more detailed. He mentions the fortification walls of Nicopolis ad Nestum which were 1.30 m. thick and still preserved to a height of over 2 m. Kanchov was impressed by the architectural fragments, slabs of marble and other remains scattered over the site. He has given a description of the road through the Rhodope mountains connecting Nicopolis with the Maritsa valley.²

The French numismatist P. Perdrizet dedicated an article to the autonomous coins of Nicopolis ad Nestum, minted in the reign of the emperors Commodus, Geta and Caracalla.³

K. Nikolov described in great details the ruins in the villages of Gospodintsi, Ognianovo, Marchevo, Gurmen, Leshten, Kovachevitsa, Skrebatno. He also traced the route of the old road going through the Rhodope mountains to Dospat, parts of which have been preserved to this day.⁴

During the Balkan Wars, B. Filov made a survey in the region and described with great precision the visible fortification walls of Nicopolis and several basilicas in the vicinity of the city.⁵

A detailed description of the ancient city and its region was made by I. Todorov. He suggested that Nicopolis was founded on the place of an older Thracian settlement (Alexandropolis) and paid great attention to the coins minted in the city. His research touched also on the hydronym Mesta.⁶

Most of the evidence about the archaeology of the Middle Mesta region in Antiquity and the Middle Ages is confined to publications in periodicals describing chance finds preserved mainly in the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia and the local museum in Gotse Delchev.⁷

Between 1960 and 1962 S. Mihailov and S. Georgieva organized an expedition for the study of medieval archaeological monuments in the Rhodope mountains. They discovered several necropolises around Satovcha and studied the fortress above the village of Dabnitsa.⁸

S. Mihailov effected trial excavations of the late medieval churches *"St Nedelya"* near the village of Kribul and *"St Archangel"* in the fortress above the village of Dabnitsa, complementing the history of the region with some evidence about this period which had remained insufficiently studied previously.⁹

¹ Jirecek 1974: 448.

² Kunchov 1970: 137 sqq.

³ Perdrizet 1906: 217-233.

⁴ Nikolov 1909: 155-177.

⁵ Filov 1993: 86-89.

⁶ Todorov 1940: 493-497, Todorov 1940/41: 101.

⁷ Beshevliev 1934: 465-466; Venedikov 1946: 233; Velkov 1921/22: 250; Velkov 1934: 465; Velkov, Danov 1938: 447-449; Gerasimov 1937a: 319, 322; Gerasimov 1938: 455; Danov 1937: 309-310; Dechev 1938: 285-286; Katsarov 1919/20: 10-12, Katsarov 1934: 58-59; Filov 1917/18: 169-170.

⁸ Georgieva 1961: 12-13.

⁹ Mihailov 1969: 147-163.

The epigraphical monuments from the region have been collected, dated and annotated by G. Mihailov.¹⁰

Z. Vuzharova and D. Stoianova-Serafimova excavated two early medieval necropolises near the villages Ablanitsa and Tuhovishte.¹¹

The archaeological activity in the region became more active in the seventies when several expeditions of different profile were launched. The expedition "Mesta" lead by M. Domaradzki carried out a large scale field survey along the left bank of the Mesta river; among the registered sites and monuments many pertained to Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹² Three early Christian basilicas were studied archaeologically in the same period.¹³

In 1980 a team lead by A. Milcheva started regular archaeological excavations of the ancient city of Nicopolis ad Nestum. These proceeded with some breaks until 1987. The excavations revealed the whole south fortification wall of Nicopolis and some private and public buildings from the 4th – 6th century A.D.¹⁴

II.4.2.2. The Roman Imperial Period and Late Antiquity

The ancient and medieval history of the Gotse Delchev region is closely related with the history of Nicopolis ad Nestum (Νικόπολις πρὸς Νέστῳ) – the largest fortified city in the Middle Mesta basin. The ruins of the ancient city are situated close to a detached part of the village of Gurmen known as *Zagrade*. The town was mentioned for the first time in the 2nd c. A.D. in the *Geography* of Claudius Ptolemy among the cities founded by the emperor Trajan in honour of his victory over the Dacians. The foundation of the city in a region with troubled Thracian population must have been aimed mainly at the establishment of control over the major roads, and mainly the one connecting via the Rhodope mountains the Via Egnatia with Philippopolis and the Central (Diagonal) Road.¹⁵ The ancient city spread soon far beyond the fortification walls, and the city territory included many small satellite industrial settlements. The significance of Nicopolis for the economy of the region is confirmed by the bronze coinage of the city in the 2nd and early 3rd century A.D., inscribed with the legend 'Ουλπίας Νικοπόλεως πρὸς Μέστῳ.¹⁶ The epigraphical monuments attest the existence of a religious society consecrated to the cult of the health deities, which seems to have exercised a great influence over the administration of the city. This cult must have been related with the hot mineral springs by the neighbouring village of Ognyanovo, famous for their healing properties and functioning to this day; in ancient times the mineral water must have been piped to the city.

Nicopolis ad Nestum was described by Socrates in the 5th century as one of the seven episcopal centres in the province of Rhodope; he also mentioned by name a bishop Polycarp who had come to the city from Sexaginta Prista came.¹⁷ The same was confirmed by an inscription found during the excavations of the fortified territory of the city.¹⁸ In the 6th century, the city was placed in the same province of Rhodope in the "Synecdemos" of Hierocles.¹⁹ During the great Slavic invasions of the beginning and middle of the 6th century, it escaped the fate of the big fortress Topeiros near the mouth of the Mesta river which was taken and sacked. Nicopolis was destroyed most probably during the later invasions of Slavs and Avars in the second half of the 6th century A.D., possibly in the time of Justin II and Sofia as suggested by a coin hoard found among the ruins of the city.²⁰

The archaeological excavations have not been able to identify with certainty the territory of the Roman city between the 2nd and 4th century. The preserved parts of the fortification walls were

¹⁰ Mihailov 1966: 285-298, tab. 162-170.

¹¹ Vuzharova, Chacheva 1968: 27; Vuzharova 1976: 447; Stoianova-Serafimova 1979: 789-804; Stoianova-Serafimova 1981b.

¹² Domaradzki et al. 1999.

¹³ Popova 1979; Dimitrova-Milcheva 1980.

¹⁴ Dimitrova-Milcheva et al. 1981, 1982, 1983, 1987.

¹⁵ Asdracha 1975: 35-42.

¹⁶ Perdrizet 1906: 217-233.

¹⁷ Socrates. – *ГИБИ* 2, 1958.

¹⁸ Dimitrova-Milcheva et al. 1982.

¹⁹ Hierokles. *Synecdemus*. – *ГИБИ* 2, 1958: 89.

²⁰ Kuzmanov 1994: 34.

built at the earliest in the middle of the 4th century.²¹ The earlier city must have comprised a greater territory if we judge by the fact that the fortification walls lie on older buildings or comply with their plans. However, for the moment there is no material evidence of earlier fortifications.

The general plan of the fortress represents an irregular polygon and comprises an area of 11 hectares (about 27 acres). In spite of the even terrain, the fortification walls are not straight. The archaeological excavations have revealed the whole south wall and parts of the east and west ones.²² Six towers were excavated along the south wall which had a length of 271.75 m. and a width of 2.40 - 2.50 m.; four of these were of circular plan and the remaining two, flanking the south gate, were square. All towers were projecting outwards from the fortification wall; their proper walls were 1.60 m. thick. There was at least one large rectangular tower along the eastern wall which is situated for the longer part under inhabited parts of the modern village of Gurmen. The tower was connected constructively with the wall, which ran at this place along the foundations of a big peristyle building, and had a stone staircase from which seven steps were preserved. Only the inner side of the western fortification wall was uncovered during the excavations. At about 100 m. from the south-western corner tower, an U-shaped tower was attached to this wall, the only one of such form studied so far; this was accessible by two staircases on both sides, eight steps being preserved from the south one and nine – from the north one. The tower lies on a destroyed earlier building with a mosaic floor. The only excavated city gate was on the south wall, some 50 m. from the south-western corner tower. The gate is shaped like a deep semicircular exedra turned inside, with the two towers situated at both ends and the 4 m. wide entrance right in the middle of the curve. The towers are of almost quadrangular shape, of relatively large dimensions (4.26 by 4.16 m. and 7.10 by 5.20 m) and have one-side staircases.

The fortification wall of Nicopolis ad Nestum is built entirely in *opus mixtum* – a building technique characteristic of the eastern provinces in the late 3rd and early 4th century. The combination of round and square towers was very popular in Thrace in this period.²³

So far there is no reliable information about the town-planning. The fact that the excavated parts of the fortification walls were built compliant with existing earlier buildings suggests that in the 4th century, when the fortified territory was reduced, the town plan was not changed radically. The street system has not been uncovered yet with the exception of a part of the *cardo maximus* excavated by the south gate; this was some 6 m. wide.

Only two buildings have been studied thus far inside the fortified city. A bath complex was wholly excavated by the southern fortification wall; it antedates the wall, which makes a detour round the *frigidarium* with a semi-circular niche. The earliest find in the bath is a bronze coin of Licinius II (A.D. 317-324).²⁴ The situation of the bath on the town plan before the construction of the fortification walls cannot be established with certitude, but judging by its dimensions, at least one of its entrances should have been facing the central square, which was the typical location of the larger public baths in Roman town-planning.²⁵ The bath in Nicopolis was burnt at the end of the 4th or the beginning of the 5th century, probably during the Gothic raids which followed the end of the Second Gothic War; it was restored later, in the last quarter of the 5th century, as shown by a gold coin of the emperor Zeno (474-491) discovered in the *frigidarium*. The bath was finally destroyed and abandoned in the time of Justin II and Sofia when the whole town was razed by the Slavs.²⁶

Another big and representative building, most likely contemporary with the bath, was uncovered partially in the south-eastern corner of the fortified city. This had a large peristyle court with a row of single rooms to the east and a big hall with benches along the walls to the south. Millstones were found on the brick floor of the latter. To the west of the hall were excavated two store-rooms with pithoi dug into the ground. This building was also constructed before the 4th century fortification wall, as evidenced by the fact that the eastern wall was built following its outline. The portico was constructed with columns, bases and plinths of different types and sizes.²⁷

²¹ Dimitrova-Milcheva 1992: 268.

²² I am most grateful to Prof. A. Milcheva who kindly gave me access to the original documentation of the excavations.

²³ Dimitrova-Milcheva 1992: 266.

²⁴ Kuzmanov 1994: 34.

²⁵ Vacheva 1994: 147.

²⁶ Kuzmanov 1994: 34.

²⁷ Dimitrova-Milcheva et al. 1983.

No temples have been excavated so far on the territory of the fortified city. Among the inscriptions from Nicopolis there is a list of the members of a religious society worshipping Asclepius; there are also dedications to Zeus, to Pluto and to the Thracian horseman (Ἡρῶι Πυρμερουλα).²⁸

With the establishment of Christianity as an official religion in the 4th century began the construction of large and representative Christian cult buildings. Several richly decorated basilicas from the 4th and 5th centuries have been excavated in the vicinity of Nicopolis ad Nestum.²⁹ Numerous architectural fragments with typical ornamentation, probably the produce of local workshops, are among the remains of these churches.³⁰ The rich decoration of these early Christian basilicas speaks of the important role of the new religion in the life of the city in Late Antiquity.³¹

The region of Nicopolis ad Nestum was densely populated during the Roman Imperial and the Early Byzantine periods. There are many settlements and necropolises from that period in the area, which unfortunately have not been seriously excavated. Fortresses guarding the valley and the city were situated on many of the surrounding mountain heights of the Rhodope and Pirin mountains. Among the best preserved and partially excavated mountain fortresses are the one near the village of Gospodintsi at the exit from Momyna Klisura, the “*St. Archangel*” fortress near the village of Dabnitsa, the fortress above the Mesta near the village of Vulkosel, the fortress “*Momina kula*” above the town of Gotse Delchev. Around these fortresses were developing settlements and necropolises. Such settlements were situated near many of the fortresses and in most cases they succeeded older places of habitation.³²

The information about the burial practices in the period discussed is scarce and difficult to interpret. Most of the necropolises are flat, though mounds are also found around the city. The typical graves were pits dug into the ground, surrounded with stones and covered with stone slabs. Although much more rarely, graves covered with tiles or constructed of bricks were also used. The deceased were most often buried with their personal belongings – jewellery and vessels. There are also graves without human remains – *cenotaphs*. Despite the establishment of Christianity as an official religion, some burial practices typical of the 1st millennium B.C. were preserved till the beginning of the 5th century A.D. The practice of burying the deceased in *cist graves* has been preserved in the Rhodope mountains till nowadays.³³

The pottery production is also marked by conservatism. The old Thracian traditions of ceramic production were still alive throughout Late Antiquity. The only certainly identified ceramic imports in Nicopolis come from North Africa and Asia Minor, but in contrast to the situation in other contemporary city centres in Thrace, this import did not influence the local production. The high percentage of vessels with typically Thracian shape and decoration suggests the preservation of the ethnic composition of the region during the Early Byzantine period. Despite the relative proximity of the Aegean ports, the transport tare is almost totally absent from the local ceramic complex. Obviously Nicopolis had a degree of self-sufficiency and the needs of its population were satisfied within the frames of its territory.³⁴

II.4.2.3. The Middle Ages

Nicopolis is mentioned in written sources from the 9th century as an independent episcopate in the Thracian eparchy at the time of Nicephorus the patriarch of Constantinople (806-815) and again in the second half of the century in the church lists of the Byzantine Empire from the time of patriarch Photius.³⁵ In 837 Khan Presian reached as far as Philippi and most likely that was the first time when the Bulgarians entered the region of the Mesta river.³⁶

²⁸ Mihailov 1966: 2337, 2340, 2343, 2344.

²⁹ Pillinger et al. 1999: 81-83, Taf. 43, 44.

³⁰ Vaklinova 1980.

³¹ Chichikova 1972a: 251.

³² Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987.

³³ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 14-15.

³⁴ Kuzmanov 1993: 43-44.

³⁵ *Notitiae Episcopatum*. – ГИБИ 4, 1961: 149-156.

³⁶ Beshevliev 1979 :132-139, № 14.

In the 10th century Nicopolis was mentioned by the Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his treatise "*De thematibus*" among the thirty-two cities in the province Macedonia Prima. Byzantine bishops of Nicopolis were mentioned till the beginning of the 11th century, despite the territorial advance of the Bulgarian kingdom.³⁷

After the devastation of Nicopolis in the 6th century, the town territory remained uninhabited for another four centuries. The town was rebuilt only at the end of the 10th century. The fortification system was reconstructed on the remains of the Late Antique walls but in much coarser technique and without bricks. Some of the towers were used as pottery kilns. The peristyle building and the bath were reconstructed into workshops and dwellings.³⁸

The archaeological finds attest trade relations with the big centres to the south (Philippi, Thessalonica). The presence of Bulgarians in the region in the 10th century is confirmed by some fragments of house pottery. The analysis of the medieval ceramic complex shows a relatively low percentage of luxury vessels which were typical of the Byzantine ceramic production in the 11th and the 12th centuries – sgraffito, vessels covered with golden or red slip or with drawings in red paint. The numerous farm tools serve as proof of the intensive agricultural production in the region of the city during this period. Probably Nicopolis developed as a centre of crafts and trade satisfying the needs of the population in the region.³⁹

The medieval necropolises continue to use the cist graves typical of the region. Most likely the Slavs inherited this practice from the older Thracian population which they gradually assimilated. Graves built of stones appear also, if more rarely (e. g. in the necropolises at Tuhovishte and Koprivlen). The graves usually contain single inhumations. Sometimes two, three or more skeletons are found together in the same grave, some of the cases representing secondary burials (in the necropolises at Ablanitsa and Koprivlen).⁴⁰

The final abandonment of Nicopolis is marked by a layer of burnt remains dated by a hoard of Byzantine coins, the latest of which are from A.D. 1204. The devastation of the city could be related with one of the Catalanians raids in this period.⁴¹

The old Late Antique fortresses in the region were partially reconstructed in the Middle Ages and had mainly a defensive function. In the 13th and 14th centuries some of them were probably used as castles by independent feudal rulers. The fortress "*Momyna kula*" above Gotse Delchev, the fortress near Hadjidimovo, the fortified settlement near Tuhovishte, the fortress near Vulkosel present some typical examples.⁴²

In 1329 Nicopolis was mentioned as subordinate to the bishop of Philippi, and later to the bishop of Seres; the name of the bishopric may have been transferred to either Xanthi or Gotse Delchev (Nevrokop).⁴³

With the invasion of the Turks, who must have taken the Middle Mesta region between 1373 and 1376, almost all fortresses and settlements were devastated and abandoned and their population gradually settled at new places, often in the near vicinity of the old ones, setting the beginnings of the settlement system which has survived till the present day.⁴⁴

³⁷ Constantinus Porphyrogenitus. *De thematibus*. – ГИИ 5, 1964: 196.

³⁸ Dimitrova-Milcheva et al. 1983: 74.

³⁹ Vaklinova 1992: 181.

⁴⁰ Vuzharova 1976: 267, 270-292.

⁴¹ Vaklinova 1985.

⁴² Tsvetkov 1981.

⁴³ Lemerle 1945: 274; Vaklinova 1992: 180.

⁴⁴ Angelov, Cholpanov 1994: 226-227.

II.5. THE ANCIENT ROAD NETWORK IN THE MIDDLE MESTA REGION

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The investigations in recent years have put forward a number of problems concerning the historical development of the region of Middle Mesta in antiquity. The archaeological finds from the vicinity of the village of Koprivlen proved the existence there of an important settlement centre, which maintained active trade relations with the Aegean littoral in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods. These active relations are rather surprising in the early period, between the 8th and 6th c. B.C., when they are positively attested by abundant imported pottery and early coins, and reveal a phenomenon which requires some explanation. The hypothetical existence of an early and highly developed metal industry (extraction of gold or silver?) in the region seems a plausible explanation. The identification of Koprivlen as an important road junction, controlling the access into the interior of Thrace, offers another possible answer.

The ancient road system in the Middle Mesta region is rarely mentioned at all in the available scientific literature. The situation is easily explained, if we take into account the deficiency of any direct and reliable evidence in the ancient literary sources and the scanty archaeological, numismatic and epigraphical finds. Some ancient roads are discussed briefly by B. Gerov and M. Domaradzki in their works on South-Western Thrace.¹ The evidence provided by Y. Ivanov in his recently published study on the place names in the Gotse Delchev region is also of importance.² The remaining cases when the problem is mentioned at all in existing publications, whether in a more general context³ or in connection with a particular historical event (e. g. the Thracian campaign of Alexander the Great in 335 B.C.⁴), are limited to general remarks without any attempt at the tracing of definite route itineraries.

The juxtaposition of the scanty antique evidence with the information about the traditional lines of communication in the Middle Ages and more recent times affords an opportunity to get a better idea of the ancient road network in the region; the procedure has proved rather successful elsewhere, but has not been attempted yet for the Mesta valley. The available detailed accounts from the late 19th and early 20th century left by S. Verkovich, captain A. Benderev, V. Kunchov, etc.⁵ provide rich material for such a study. All these writings establish the picture of a rather developed traditional road network, in which Koprivlen seems definitely to have played the role of a communication junction.

To the south-east of the Nevrokop Plain, the Mesta river enters a long and impassable canyon wedged between the northern slopes of Mount Bozdag (Falakron) and the south-western ridges of the Rhodopes. Travelling through the narrow gorge was impracticable and the roads in the area had to

¹ Gerov 1961: 216-217; Domaradzki 1995: 37-39; Domaradzki et al. 1999: 19.

² Ivanov 1996.

³ Spiridonov 1982: 56; Spiridonov 1999: 61; Dimitrov 1989.

⁴ Vulić 1909: 490; Georgiev 1962: 6; Tacheva 1987: 29; Spiridonov 1992: 9; Popov 1996: 18-21, 22-23, 27.

⁵ Verkovich 1889: 67-81; Benderev 1890: 461-470; Shopov 1893: 72-83; Kunchov 1895: 235-249; Kunchov 1896: 323-355; 1898: 11; Perdrizet 1900: 548-552.

take a different direction, away from the river course.⁶ Several alternative routes, well described in the above-mentioned publications, were used in the past as the main ways out of the region in a southern direction, towards the Aegean littoral.

The old road which connected Nevrokop with Drama by way of Koprivlen, Libyahovo (Ilinden), Vezme (Exohi), Vulkovo, Zurnovo (Kato Nevrokopion), Gyuredjik (Granitis) and Prosochen (Prosotseni) seems to have been the most important land route in the area. A well preserved section of this road is still to be seen south from Koprivlen, running for several kilometres in a north to south direction and having a 4 m. wide stone pavement with kerb stones on both sides. A part of the same road near the Kendika Heights between Koprivlen and Libyahovo was called "Arabayoli" in Ottoman times, which means "cart road" in Turkish.⁷ It is difficult to establish without archaeological investigations whether the road is of Turkish or earlier (possibly Roman) date. The archaeological materials from the wider roadside area provide however enough evidence about the existence of very early and active trade relations with the Aegean; these are exemplified by the finds of red-figured pottery around Gotse Delchev⁸ and especially by the impressive results of the recent archaeological excavations in Koprivlen which have yielded considerable quantities of imported Mycenaean, Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic pottery.⁹ The numismatic material supplies further evidence.¹⁰ A dispersed coin hoard of exceptional scientific importance found in 1978 in the vicinity of Gotse Delchev consisted of more than 30 pieces, including early issues of Thasos and of the Thracian dynast Saratokos.¹¹ Another coin hoard containing silver staters and drachms of Thasos and a stater of the Orescii was found in the same area in 1939.¹² In addition to these casual finds, the rescue excavations near Koprivlen have yielded in the last few years a certain amount of early coins from the late 6th and 5th c. B.C. from a pertinent archaeological context.¹³

On Bulgarian territory the Second World War German road which will be followed by the new road connection between Gotse Delchev and Drama from the Second World War takes an alternative parallel course and runs a few kilometres to the east of the old route, passing through Sadovo and bypassing Ilinden (Libyahovo).

Preserved remains of an old (probably Roman) paved road have also been noticed in the area of the Gyuredjik Pass in Mount Bozdag.¹⁴ The modern road between Drama and the closed valley of Zurnevo (Kato Nevrokopion) in Greece follows the same itinerary. An alternative road branch started once from the village of Zurnevo and headed south between Mount Sturgach and Mount Bozdag, descending into the Drama Plain down a small river.¹⁵ Another side-road branched off at Exohi and, passing between the modern villages of Teplen and Petrelik, crossed the Mesta by a bridge, the ruins of which are still visible near the mouth of the tributary Mutnitsa south-east from Hadjidimovo, heading directly into the Western Rhodopes.¹⁶

The road to Drama was of paramount significance for the whole Middle Mesta region in the past, before it was closed by the establishment of the modern state frontier between Bulgaria and Greece after World War I. According to the available evidence, previously the bulk of the export production of the Razlog and Nevrokop basins and the neighbouring mountain districts was transported to the port of Kavala by means of this road.¹⁷

⁶ Kunchov 1895: 238.

⁷ Ivanov 1996: 68.

⁸ Reho 1990: Tav. II, V; Reho 1992: 14.

⁹ Cf. Chapter IV.4.2-4 *infra*.

¹⁰ The present paper does not aim at a specific analysis of the numismatic material from the region. Only finds of relatively early coins, dating from the end of the 6th until the first half of the 4th c. B.C., are mentioned in the text. The abundant numismatic material from later periods is not discussed at all.

¹¹ Yurukova 1979: 59. Prof. Yurukova who had the chance to examine only a few of the dispersed coins suggests that two staters of the *Orescii* from an unknown place in the district of Blagoevgrad might have been a part of the same hoard.

¹² Gerasimov 1939: 344.

¹³ Cf. Chapter IV.1 *infra*.

¹⁴ Shopov 1893: 83, 87; Perdrizet 1900: 551.

¹⁵ Kunchov 1896: 334.

¹⁶ Unpublished field survey from 1995.

¹⁷ Shopov 1893: 49.

Remains of another paved road called "Kaldaruma" by the local inhabitants have survived south-west from Koprivlen, at the foot of the Pirin Mountains and to the west of the preserved section of the Drama road (*Colour Plates, Fig. 285*).¹⁸ Its direction corroborates the 19th and early 20th century evidence about the existence of a road link between Nevrokop and Seres. V. Kunchov and S. Verkovich give detailed accounts of this route.¹⁹ It separated from the Drama road at Koprivlen and took for the old village of Turlis by way of Staro Lyaski, Lyalevo, Luki, Gaytaninovo and Lovcha. At Turlis the road bifurcated; the western branch ran through Karakyoï and Krushevo (Ahladohorion), descending into the Struma valley near Demir Hisar (Siderokastron). The other road branch made an eastern detour round Mount Cherna Gora through Starchishta and Dolno Brodi, then headed south-west between Mount Sharliya (Vrondû) and Mount Zmiynitsa (Menikion) and descended directly in Seres via Banitsa and Rahovitsa. Kunchov writes that the western road branch was straighter but steeper and unusable in winter because of the height of the pass between Mount Cherna Gora and Mount Ali Botush; the longer but lower and much more convenient eastern branch of the road was preferred in that season.²⁰ Paul Perdrizet mentions the information of a French engineer engaged at the time in the construction of the railroad between Drama and Seres about a preserved section of an old Roman (?) road, some 300-400 m. long and heading due north from the village of Banitsa;²¹ the remains fit well at the southern end of the eastern branch of the discussed road.

The village of Turlis, where the ancient road to Seres bifurcated, appears to have been an important road junction in the past, and it is no wonder that one of the major regional fairs was held there.²² It is mentioned as one of the wealthiest villages in the Murvashko region. Iron metallurgy and iron-working were practised on a large scale in Turlis, Gaytaninovo, Teshovo and other neighbouring villages, and the whole region was traditionally established as one of the main centres of local iron-production in the Balkans.

The two branches of the road to Seres had an additional connection between them by way of a track in the vicinity of Gorno Brodi, which crossed the pass between Mount Cherna Gora and Mount Sharliya. Another side-road branched off in the region of Gaytaninovo and gained the Struma valley near Marikostino and Kulata, making use of the high Paril Pass to cross the main ridge of the Pirin.²³ A possible connection existed also between the two main roads connecting the Nevrokop Plain alternatively with Drama and Seres, which approached one another in the region of the villages of Starchishta and Zurnevo; this lowland connection was facilitated by the short distance between the two villages (Vasil Kunchov estimates it at 2 hours walking).²⁴

The main communication lines in the region – the Drama and Seres roads – joined at Koprivlen and ran together further north to Nevrokop. In Ottoman times there was an inn at the outskirts of the village, marking the important crossroads.²⁵

The available information reveals thus the picture of a rather developed traditional road network, with many alternative routes in the section between the Nevrokop Plain and Drama and Seres. The preserved remains of old paved roads still visible here and there by the end of the 19th century and even nowadays also suggest a long tradition and continuity of the road system in the area.

The valley of the Mesta becomes again less passable north of Gotse Delchev, in the 40 km long Momin Prohod gorge ("Kız dervent" in Turkish). An old road followed the river course through the pass, but according to 19th-century information the road was impracticable for carts in this age. Because of the unfavourable conditions in the gorge, an alternative road existed high up in the slopes of the Pirin, but this was also a bad and difficult one.²⁶ Some old travel books mention preserved road sections with remains of ancient pavement,²⁷ and captain Nikolov even writes directly of "an old Ro-

¹⁸ Unpublished field surveys from 1995; 1996: 114.

¹⁹ Verkovich 1889: 80; Kunchov 1896: 323-354.

²⁰ Kunchov 1896: 323.

²¹ Perdrizet 1900: 548-552.

²² Kunchov 1896: 338. The author gives evidence that the entire trade in Eastern Macedonia was concentrated in four main fairs, held in Seres, Turlis, Nevrokop and near Melnik.

²³ Kunchov 1896: 346; Kunchov 1898: 3, 5.

²⁴ Kunchov 1896: 334.

²⁵ Benderev 1890: 463; Kunchov 1896: 354.

²⁶ Benderev 1890: 462; Shopov 1893: 102; Kunchov 1895: 238; Nikolov 1911: 154-157.

²⁷ Benderev 1892: 462; Nikolov 1911: 156-157.

man road", paved with big stones. Despite the fact that they offered a possible link with the region of Pazardjik via Avramovi kolibi and even with Samokov by way of a now obsolete route through the Rila Mountains,²⁸ these roads were used mainly by the local population; the communications between the Razlog and Nevrokop basins seem therefore to have been underdeveloped and of hardly more than local significance.

Another old road, connecting the Nevrokop Plain with the valley of the Maritsa river around Pazardjik and Plovdiv through the Western Rhodopes, seems to have been traditionally much more important. The exact course of this road is not known in details, and alternative routes existed possibly in some sections. The modern road from Gotse Delchev to Pazardjik and Plovdiv via Dospat, Batak and Peshtera follows one of the variant routes used in the 19th century.²⁹ The late 19th and early 20th century travel books mention two main road-courses for the southern part of this road, above the left bank of the Mesta and in the Dospat branch of the Rhodopes.³⁰ After crossing the Mesta near Nevrokop, the first one passed through Dubnitsa, Krushovo and Dolen, and climbing up the valley of Bistritsa gained Satovcha. From Satovcha the road went on through the so-called *Yayla* towards the central Rhodopes massif and the Bulgarian-Turkish frontier of 1878-1912. The second course after crossing the Mesta passed by the ruins of Nicopolis ad Nestum and rose up to Karaorman on the Dubrash ridge either by way of Fotovishta (modern Ognyanovo), Skrebatno and Kovachevitsa, or more directly via Leshten and Kovachevitsa. Thence it descended into the Dospat valley near the inns (the so-called "Han Dospat") where the old Turkish custom-house was placed. From there the road continued towards the central massif of the Rhodopes and the old frontier, merging eventually with its other branch. In the old travel books both roads are described as "horseback", inconvenient and narrow; travelling by cart seems to have been impossible. However, the importance of the road across the Western Rhodopes was evidently on the decline in the late 19th century, and the situation has surely not always been the same. In the 16th century for example it was known by the name of "The Great Road",³¹ which seems rather instructive of its importance during the Ottoman period. The road must have lost much of its former significance with the establishment of the modern political frontier in 1878.

The old roads are difficult to trace in the uninhabited central mountain area of the Western Rhodopes, but their vestiges have been reported or are still to be seen at many places along the above-described routes in Mount Dospat and the Dubrash ridge: the remains of an old road track and of an old arched bridge near Debren,³² those of a "Roman" road in the locality called "Druma" ("The Road") 10 km north from the village of Dolen,³³ those of an old paved road, of a bridge and several ancient inscriptions east or north-east from the village of Kovachevitsa.³⁴ One of these inscriptions is a Roman milestone from the time of the emperors Constantine, Constantius and Constans (A.D. 333-337), re-inscribed 46 years later (in A.D. 383) during the joint reign of the emperors Valentinian, Gratian and Theodosius.³⁵ Unfortunately the editors of the inscription have not been able to pinpoint its exact finding place: the general locality "Karaorman" is mentioned, and an approximate distance of 3,5 hours east from the village of Kovachevitsa.³⁶ Another antique inscription, this one in Greek,

²⁸ Benderev 1890: 461-464.

²⁹ Benderev 1890: 469-470; Shopov 1893.

³⁰ Benderev 1890: 469-470; Kunchov 1898: 12-13; Nikolov 1911: 172-173; Zlatarev 1912.

³¹ Petrov 1965: 33.

³² Stoianova-Serafimova 1965; Ivanov 1996: 114. Yordan Ivanov mentions a locality called "*Kaldarmite*" (most probably deriving from the word "*kaldurum*" meaning "*pavement*") 500 m. west from the village.

³³ Ivanov 1996: 104.

³⁴ Nikolov 1911: 173; Zlatarev 1912: 87.

³⁵ Perdrizet 1900: 547-549; Nikolov 1911: 172; Gerov 1961: 216. The inscription is first mentioned by Perdrizet, who published it after a copy placed at his disposal, but without personally seeing it. A few years later captain Nikolov saw the inscription in the church yard in Kovachevitsa, where it had been brought from the Karaorman locality. In his study on the western Thracian lands, B. Gerov agrees in general with the earlier comments of Perdrizet. He adds only that the time of the construction of the road remains uncertain, while the two inscriptions on the stone mark two repairs, the first in the last years of the reign of Constantine the Great, and the second under Theodosius II.

³⁶ Nikolov 1911: 172-173; Zlatarev 1911: 64; Zlatarev 1912: 117; Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987: 75. The Karaorman locality and the finding place of the inscription – "*Manastirishteto*" ("The Old Monastery") –

comes allegedly from the same site east from Kovachevitsa;³⁷ although its text is not directly connected with roads, its very presence sustains the idea of a Roman road station somewhere in this vicinity.

Two very impressive coin hoards have been found near the village of Skrebatno, quite close to Kovachevitsa. The first one is reported by T. Gerasimov in 1964;³⁸ it was partly dispersed but a bulk of 192 Thasian silver coins was saved, including 5 staters and 187 tetrobols. The other hoard remains unpublished; it was found in 1989 and contained 200 Thasian coins of different denominations.³⁹ Of course, these very rich coin hoards do not fix precisely the road tracks of the age, but they illustrate the actual existence of trade (?) links which would be impossible without a developed road system. The same is valid for the Attic pottery found near Dospat, Chavdar and Borino;⁴⁰ in view of the present state of exploration it could be considered only in a general context. The location of Nicopolis ad Nestum (near the modern village of Gurmen) is of little help in solving the problems of the ancient road system in the region, since all the road-courses mentioned so far (including the one via Dubnitsa, Dolen and Satovcha) are equally accessible from it. The location of the city is probably in relation only with the thermal springs in the vicinity of Gurmen and Ognyanovo.

The information about remains of ancient roads and bridges near the villages Ablanitsa, Kribul and Bogolin⁴¹ refer to a section of another road, connecting the main Western Rhodopes road via the bridge near Hadjidimovo with the already described road branch which ran south between Petrelik and Teplen to Exohi and Zurnevo. This would have been the shortest, but hardly the most convenient road link between the Western Rhodopes road and the Aegean coast. Either by way of Satovcha and Dospat, or making a link with the more western routes in the vicinity of Kovachevitsa, it proceeded further north to Batak and the upper Maritsa valley. A hoard of 5 silver Thasian coins found in 1998 near the village of Furgovo can be connected generally with this road section.⁴²

The ground surveys carried out in the 70s by a research team conducted by M. Domaradzki have established the existence of another ancient road, which passed near Brashten, Vaklinovo and Osina. Ruins of old bridges were discovered in the vicinity of Brashten and Osina and remains of an old paved road were registered near Vaklinovo.⁴³ A stray Thasian silver coin was found near the village of Tuhovishta, in the presumable direction of the same road.⁴⁴

This short review shows clearly that the available information is insufficient for the full elucidation of the problems pertaining to the ancient road network in the Middle Mesta valley and in the Western Rhodopes. It seems probable that several alternative routes through the region were simultaneously in use in antiquity, but the matters needs further systematic exploration, including the archaeological excavations of the preserved road sections, of the remains of bridges and of the presumed road stations. The available evidence, although scarce and fragmentary, is enough however to sustain positively the great importance of the Western Rhodopes road linking, through the Middle Mesta valley, the Aegean littoral and the Upper Thracian Plain since at least the Archaic period, but possibly (if

are situated east-north-east from the village. S. Zlatarev writes that there were "*ruins of a monastery and worked stones with Latin inscriptions on them*" at that place. The information of captain Nikolov is also interesting and important to note: he points out that the remains of the big stone bridge in the region of Kovachevitsa were situated near the "*Manastirisheto*", north-east from the Karaorman. According to S. Zlatarev the road which left the village and ran across the Karaorman was paved, especially along the mountain ridges. It has already been suggested that a Roman road station must have existed there. The site is located with more precision by Tsvetana Dremsizova-Nelchinova: 10-11 km north-east from the village, above the *Veslets* forestry enterprise.

³⁷ Mihailov 1966: 2349.

³⁸ Gerasimov 1964: 240; Kolev, Slavcheva 1972: 26-29. According to K. Kolev and T. Slavcheva, the coins amounted to about 250. There were also 3 golden earrings together with the coins in the same vessel.

³⁹ Our thanks to Miss Spaska Paskova, curator of the Historical Museum in Gotse Delchev, who kindly placed at our disposal the information about this find. The coins are kept at present in the Historical Museum in Blagoevgrad.

⁴⁰ Domaradzki 1995: 35.

⁴¹ Ivanov 1996: 77, 161.

⁴² Five Thasian silver hemipectae of the "*Silenos/crater*" type were found. The hoard is now kept in the museum in Gotse Delchev.

⁴³ Domaradzki et al. 1999: 19.

⁴⁴ A Thasian obolos was donated to the museum in Gotse Delchev.

the finds of Mycenaean pottery at Koprivlen are taken into consideration) even since the Late Bronze Age.

The predominance of Thasian coins in the hoards from the region is rather noteworthy. The situation is similar to the one registered in the Central and Eastern Rhodopes, where the prevalent finds of the coins of Abdera and Maroneia reflect their respective commercial domination. The Middle Mesta valley sustained permanent contacts with the Aegean world, and moreover played the role of an intermediary between the Aegean and the upper Maritsa plain. The latter can be asserted definitely for the 5th and 4th c. B.C. on the basis of the rich coin finds from the region of Pazardjik⁴⁵ and the presumed establishment of the emporion Pistiros near the modern village of Vetren.

The other basic conclusion refers to the Thracian settlement near the village of Koprivlen, which appears to have been an important junction in the ancient road network. As already mentioned above, the roads leading south towards Drama – Kavala (i.e. Neapolis, Thasos and Abdera) and Seres (i.e. Amphipolis and the Chalcidice Peninsula) forked there. The ancient road in northern direction must have crossed the Mesta river also somewhere in the close vicinity of Koprivlen.

⁴⁵ Gerasimov 1937: 249-257; Gerasimov 1955: 576-578; Yurukova 1992: 11-16.

III. THE LATE BRONZE AGE SETTLEMENT AT KOPRIVLEN

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The site was discovered in 1998 during a preliminary survey of the future road area. The principal purpose of the five trial trenches excavated in 1998 along the roadbed was to clarify the nature and size of the site, which proved to be a Late Bronze Age settlement situated between axial points Nos 46 and 51. Rescue excavations were undertaken in 1999 in order to study the whole area affected by the impending construction of the road.

The site is located on an inclined terrace to the south of the early Thracian settlement site which was identified since 1995.¹ The rescue character of the excavations and the existence of a 1 m. thick recent alluvial accumulation established during the trial excavations in 1998 permitted the use of machines for the removal of the surface strata. For the sake of convenience, in the initial stage of research a special grid was set up, based on the general 5 m. one but with larger, 10 m. squares. A total of 40 "large" squares were laid out on the terrace; in the course of the excavations it was established that the site is situated within the limits of squares Nos 12-35. The correlation between the "large" squares and the general 5 m. grid is shown in *Table 1*.

Table 1. Correlation between the "large" squares and the general grid

<i>Square №12</i>	<i>Square №16-17</i>	<i>Square №21</i>	<i>Square №26</i>	<i>Square №29</i>
39-T-XIII-i-10	39-T-XIII-n-8	39-T-XIII-s-2	39-T-XIII-t-3	39-T-XIII-u-1
39-T-XIII-i-11	39-T-XIII-o-5		39-T-XIII-t-7	39-T-XIII-u-2
39-T-XIII-i-12	39-T-XIII-o-6	<i>Square №22</i>	39-T-XIII-t-8	39-T-XIII-u-5
39-T-XIII-i-14		39-T-XIII-s-3	39-T-XIII-t-11	39-T-XIII-u-6
39-T-XIII-i-15	<i>Square №18</i>	39-T-XIII-s-4	39-T-XIII-t-12	39-T-XIII-u-7
39-T-XIII-i-16	39-T-XIII-n-10	39-T-XIII-s-7	39-T-XIII-t-15	
39-T-XIII-n-2	39-T-XIII-n-11	39-T-XIII-s-8	39-T-XIII-t-16	<i>Square №30</i>
39-T-XIII-n-3	39-T-XIII-n-14		39-T-XIII-p-9	39-T-XIII-y-10
39-T-XIII-n-4	39-T-XIII-n-15	<i>Square №23</i>	39-T-XIII-p-13	39-T-XIII-y-11
		39-T-XIII-t-1		39-T-XIII-y-12
<i>Square №13</i>	<i>Square №19</i>	39-T-XIII-t-2	<i>Square №27</i>	39-T-XIII-y-15
39-T-XIII-j-13	39-T-XIII-n-12	39-T-XIII-t-5	39-T-XIII-y-1	39-T-XIII-y-16
39-T-XIII-o-1	39-T-XIII-n-16	39-T-XIII-t-6	39-T-XIII-y-2	39-T-XIII-u-13
	39-T-XIII-o-9		39-T-XIII-y-5	39-T-XVIII-e-3
<i>Square №14</i>	39-T-XIII-o-13	<i>Square №25</i>	39-T-XIII-y-6	39-T-XVIII-e-4
39-T-XIII-m-4		39-T-XIII-t-9		39-T-XVIII-a-1
39-T-XIII-n-1	<i>Square №20</i>	39-T-XIII-t-10	<i>Square №28</i>	
39-T-XIII-n-5	39-T-XIII-o-10	39-T-XIII-t-13	39-T-XIII-y-3	
	39-T-XIII-o-11	39-T-XIII-t-14	39-T-XIII-y-4	
<i>Square №15</i>	39-T-XIII-o-14		39-T-XIII-y-7	
39-T-XIII-n-6	39-T-XIII-o-15		39-T-XIII-y-8	
39-T-XII-n-7				

The excavations in the sector established the existence of two successive horizons from the Late Bronze Age; later in the Early Iron Age the area was used for sacrificial and burial purposes. In the second phase of the existence of the Late Bronze Age settlement (first building horizon, *Late*

¹ Cf. *Chapter II* supra.

Bronze Age II or *Koprivlen II*) the whole architectural plan was changed, stone building foundations were introduced and the greatest part of the previous (second) building horizon (*Late Bronze Age I* or *Koprivlen I*) was levelled and destroyed. The cult practices during the Early Iron Age made use of the stone foundations of the Late Bronze Age buildings and thus the greatest part of the *Late Bronze Age II* horizon was also destroyed. In the 1950s, the local administration initiated a project for the modernization of the western periphery of the village. A new water pipe was laid in a 0.80 m. wide ditch which crosses the whole site in a north to south direction. At about the same time, work on a later abandoned ring-road led to considerable bulldozing of the area, large quantities of soil being dug out from some places and used as a fill in others in order to level the terrain. During the 1970s, an underground telephone cable was laid by the frontier police in a ditch parallel to the water pipe, which also destroyed a part of the settlement. A number of recent repairs of the water pipe resulted in the excavation of a series of large pits (each measuring at least 2 by 3 m.) and further destruction of the archaeological site. All these recent modernization and economic activities have severely damaged the site and disturbed its stratigraphy. The settlement plan of the Late Bronze Age site, especially that of the earlier phase, is almost beyond reconstruction, and the situation is quite similar with the topography of the Early Iron Age cult structures.

III.1. ARCHAEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

The archaeological structures established on the site during the rescue excavations in 1998 and 1999 are listed by period, building horizon and square.

Early Iron Age

Square 19

Structure 19-10 (Grave No 1). The grave was found at 1.20 m. below the modern surface level, near the north profile of the square. The eastern part of the grave was destroyed by the ditch of the water pipe. The form and size of the grave pit could not be established (*Fig. 4*.) The grave contained a cremation burial – fragments of burnt bones and ashes deposited in a deep vessel. No traces of a pyre were attested. The grave contained no burial goods.

Structure 19-30 (Grave No 2). This grave was situated at a distance of 2 m. south-west of grave No 1. The form and the size of the grave pit could not be established. The grave contained a cremation burial with fragments of burnt bones and ashes deposited in a deep vessel placed next to the stone wall 19-20 from the first Late Bronze Age horizon (*Fig. 4*). No traces of a pyre were attested. The grave contained no burial goods. The size of the bones suggests that the buried person was a child.

Structure 19-51 (Grave No 3). Another almost entirely destroyed grave was uncovered at a distance of 2.60 m. south-east of grave No 2. It also contained a cremation burial with fragments of burnt bones and ashes placed in a vessel. Another ceramic vessel had been placed next to the urn probably as an offering. The two vessels had been placed next to stone wall 19-20 of the first Late Bronze Age horizon. Unfortunately, the form and size of both vessels were beyond reconstruction (*Fig. 4*). No traces of a pyre were attested.

Structure 19-50 (pit). A 0.50 m. deep pit of irregular oval shape was located between graves Nos 1 and 3. It had a diameter of 1.40 m. and cut through the two Late Bronze Age horizons down to the virgin soil. The fill was composed of earth, stones and a few scattered nondescript handmade potsherds. The pit was covered with a 1.50 m. circle of stones of medium and large size (*Fig. 4*).

Structure 19-30 (pit). A pit of irregular oval shape filled with earth, stones and a few scattered nondescript handmade ceramic sherds. The pit was covered with stones of medium and large size forming an oval 1.70 by 1.0 m. (*Fig. 4*).

Structure 19-60 (pit). A pit of irregular oval form adjoining from the south stone wall 19-20 of the first Late Bronze Age horizon. The pit was filled with earth, stones and a few scattered handmade potsherds and was covered with stones of medium size forming a 0.80 by 0.85 m. rectangle (*Fig. 4*).

Structure 19-70 (pit). This pit of irregular elliptical section was found by the south profile of the square. It was filled with earth containing a few handmade pottery sherds and covered by medium size stones arranged as an oval construction measuring 0.80 by 0.90 m. An intact vessel – a one-

handled cup with grooved decoration – was found between this pit and the stone wall 19-90 of the first Late Bronze Age horizon (Fig. 4).

Structure 19-80 (pit). The pit was adjoining from the south stone wall 19-90 of the first Late Bronze Age horizon. It was filled with earth containing a few sherds of handmade pottery, and covered by stones of medium size forming an oval construction of 1.50 by 0.60 m. (Fig. 4).

Squares 16-17

Structure 16-20. The structure represents an amassment of middle to large sized stones arranged in a single layer in the shape of an oval measuring 4.40 by 4.50 m. A small number of nondescript handmade potsherds and pieces of clay plastering were found among the stones (Fig. 4).

Squares 20, 23, and 26

Structure 23-20. A roughly rectangular platform measuring 5.55 by 11.00 m., situated in a northwest to southeast position along a stone wall from the first Late Bronze Age horizon which forms its southern end. It was established that a pit was dug first next to the Late Bronze Age wall; this was filled with pottery sherds, stones, animal bones and soil. The pit was then covered with a layer of yellow virgin soil over which a layer of middle to large sized stones were arranged in a rectangular shape (Fig. 9). Ceramic vessels were deliberately broken and scattered during the construction of the platform (Fig. 4). Stones and soil from both Late Bronze Age horizons were used in this structure, and a small number of materials associated with them were interpolated among the Early Iron Age finds.

Square 28

Structure 28-30. This structure of strongly elongated oval shape measuring 11.80 by 0.80/1.00 m., was orientated from northwest to southeast. It was constructed of a single layer of stones of small and medium size. A small quantity of handmade potsherds and an iron object, most probably a fragment of an iron spearhead, were found among the stones (Fig. 4).

Late Bronze Age

First Building Horizon (Koprivlen II)

Squares 18, 19, 23, 26

Stone wall. The foundation of a stone wall running in a northwest to southeast direction was investigated in the above mentioned squares. This was built of two contiguous rows of stones and was between 0.80 and 1.00 m. thick. In height it contained between two and four preserved courses of stones. The wall follows roughly the natural configuration of the terrain, the declivity between the two end points in the northwest and southeast being only 0.80 m. (Fig. 5).

The stone foundations of several buildings were found on both sides of the wall; these will be described below.

Squares 14, 17

Stone wall. The foundations of another stone wall, running from west to east almost at right angle to the one described above, were uncovered in these squares. The wall was up to 0.80 m. thick, built of two to three contiguous rows of middle and large size stones. In height the preserved part had up to two courses of stones. The part of the wall within the excavated area measures 8.49 m. in length (Fig. 5).

Squares 15, 16, 19

The stone foundations of an *oval building* were discovered in the mentioned squares south of the long wall. The foundations were up to 0.60 m. thick, formed of two rows of middle size stones. Up to two courses of stones were preserved in height. The foundations were greatly damaged by the Early Iron Age structure 16-20. It could be suggested that originally the building had an oval form elongated from north to south and measuring 9.20 by 6.50 m. (Fig. 5). All the equipment of the building which was probably a living house was also destroyed by the Early Iron Age structure.

Square 14

Structure 15-10 (pithos). The pithos was discovered in the south-eastern corner of the square, situated at equal distances from the two long stone walls and the building in squares 15, 16 and 18 (Fig. 5).

Square 17

Structure 17-10. The structure is interpreted as a part of a *living house*. The foundations of the preserved backside wall, 0.50 to 0.60 m. thick, were formed by two rows of middle size stones. Judging by the remains it could be supposed that the building had an oval form with a north to south orientation and a width of about 6.50 m. (Fig. 5). The place of the doorway could not be established. The floor was made of levelled and beaten soil. No equipment was preserved in the building.

Squares 19, 22, 23

Structure 19-50, 22-10. The structure is also interpreted as a *living house*. The southern part was destroyed by Early Iron Age structures and by the ditch of the water pipe. This dwelling was also of elongated oval form, orientated from northwest to southeast with a doorway probably at the south-eastern end. The preserved part of the building is 4.20 m. wide, and its full length was probably about 8.00 m. The foundations, up to 1.0 m. thick, were constructed of two contiguous rows of middle to large size stones. The foundations of the stone wall in squares 19 and 23 described above were incorporated in the south long wall of the house (Fig. 5). The floor was almost completely destroyed by later intrusions; the preserved part suggests that it was made of levelled and beaten soil. Several fragmented ceramic vessels permitting graphical reconstruction and a rim fragment from an imported Mycenaean vessel were found inside this structure.

Square 23

Structure 23-60. The structure is identified as the foundation of another *living house*. The preserved part is of oval form, the wall is between 0.40 and 0.50 m. thick and consists of a double row of middle and large size stones (Fig. 5).

Structure 23-61. At a distance of 1.10 m. to the south of structure 23-60, a *pithos* set into the ground was uncovered. Fragments of pottery and plastering were found around the pithos (Fig. 5).

Squares 25, 28

Structure 25-10, 28-10. The structure is interpreted as the stone foundation of a *wall*, which runs at a distance varying between 10.10 and 10.30 m. to the southwest of the long wall in squares 18, 19, 23 and 26 and almost parallel to it. The wall is 0.50 m. thick and was built of two rows of stones of medium size (Fig. 5). A considerable quantity of potsherds and animal bones was recovered on both sides of the wall. An imported Mycenaean fragment was found to the south of the wall, in the south-eastern corner of the square.

Square 26

Structure 26-20. The structure was identified as a part of a *living house*. Its western and northern parts have been destroyed by the Early Iron Age structure 23-10, and its eastern end lies beyond the excavated area. The preserved southern part of the house consists of two walls. The foundations of these are 0.60 wide and are formed of two rows of middle size stones. The entrance at the southern end is 0.70 wide (Fig. 5). Judging from the preserved part, this house seems to repeat the form of the almost entirely preserved one in square 35. The floor is made of levelled and beaten soil; great quantities of ceramic sherds and animal bones were found scattered over it.

Structure 26-30. This is identified as a *room* in a dwelling. The excavated part is situated between the long wall and the foundation of structure 26-20. An oven (26-31) abutting against the foundations of the long wall was discovered in the south-eastern part of the room. The oven had a horse-shoe shape, measuring 1.20 by 1.0 m. (Fig. 5). Pottery sherds and stones of small and medium size were placed as a foundation of the oven. The floor of the oven was coated with well-refined clay, 0.02 m. thick. A hoard of four bronze arrowheads was discovered between the oven and the foundations of structure 26-20. A fifth arrowhead was found on the top course of the stone wall to the south of the oven. A considerable quantity of ceramic sherds and animal bones were found on the floor of the room.

Structure 26-40. This structure, the stone foundation of a wall, was traced for a distance of 2.0 m. to the south of the long wall. It is 0.50 wide, formed by a double row of stones of medium size (Fig. 5).

Structure 26-50. The stone foundation of another wall, 0.40 m. wide, runs at a distance of 2.10 m. to the southeast of 26-40. This too is formed of a double row of middle size stones (Fig. 5).

Structures 26-40 and 26-50 have been severely damaged by the ditch of the water pipe and by subsequent repairs making their interpretation very uncertain. The preserved parts give the impression of habitable rooms situated to the south of the long wall. Notable quantities of sherds, among them fragments of pithoi, and animal bones were found in the rooms and on the street running between them and the long wall. A fragment of a Mycenaean skyphos and a bronze arrowhead were found near structure 26-40.

Square 28

Structure 28-20. The stone foundation of a wall traced in the south-western part of the square, 0.50 m. wide, and formed by a double row of middle size stones (Fig. 5).

Square 30

Structure 30-10. The stone foundations of two walls, formed by double rows of middle size stones and from 0.50 to 0.60 m. wide (Fig. 5).

The interpretation of the structures in squares 28 and 30 is very problematic as they have been considerably destroyed during the construction of the ring-road in the 1950s.

Square 35

Structure 35-10. The stone foundations of an *apsidal building*, its north-western corner being destroyed by the ditch of the modern water pipe. The foundations were built of two contiguous rows of stones. In depth the back wall has three preserved courses of stones due to the declivity of the terrain to the north, and the stones used in this part are up to 1.0 m. long and 0.60 m. wide. The foundations of the western and eastern walls have two preserved courses of middle size stones, and that of the southern wall a single course of middle size stones. The entrance is in the western wall and is 1.30 m. wide (Fig. 6). The floor was made of levelled and beaten clay. A layer of middle size stones in the northern part of the building served apparently both to compensate for the declivity and for drainage under the floor. In the centre of the house was placed a small, roughly circular fireplace of about 0.54 m. in diameter. The foundation of the fireplace consists of particles of stone, plastered with 0.02 m. thick well-refined clay. Three large stones were placed horizontally by and against the doorway. Pottery sherds, including two wheelmade imported fragments, and bones were found on the floor.

Second Building Horizon (Koprivlen I)

Square 16-17

Structure 16-30, 50, 60, 70. The structure is interpreted as a part of a *living house* or *workshop*. It was discovered in the western part of the square. A big part of it was destroyed by the Early Iron Age structures 16-20 and 16-80 and by the ditch of the modern water pipe which passes through it. The remains of three fireplaces were uncovered within the structure, on the level of the floor of beaten clay. The fireplace 16-30 was destroyed by a stone wall of the first Late Bronze Age horizon; the preserved part of its hearth suggests that it was rectangular in form with rounded corners. Its foundation was made of small particles of stone plastered twice with layers of purified clay, 0.05 and 0.03 m. thick. Fireplace 16-60 was found at a distance of 4.00 m. to the northwest of fireplace 16-30; its preserved parts show that it had a similar shape and construction and measured some 1.22 m. from west to east. A third fireplace, structure 16-70, was found at a distance of 1.50 m. south-west of fireplace 16-60. This third fireplace was destroyed by the construction of stone wall 16-40 in the period of the first Late Bronze Age horizon. The fireplace lies directly on the floor, and is similar in construction to fireplace 16-30. Both fireplaces 16-60 and 16-70 have only one top layer of purified clay (Fig. 8).

A concentration of fragmented pottery (structure 16-50) was explored around fireplace 16-70 and in the area between it and fireplace 16-60. The concentration contained two complete vessels – an

amphora and a jug, and fragments of another three vessels. Seven spindle-whorls had been placed in the amphora. From a stratigraphic point of view, the stone wall 16-40 from the first Late Bronze Age horizon overlaps both fireplace 16-70 and the pottery concentration 16-50.

Square 18

Structure 18-20. A part of a beaten clay *floor* was discovered in the north-eastern corner of the square, below the stone wall of the first Late Bronze Age horizon. A footed bowl was found on this floor.

Square 22

Structure 22-20. This was uncovered in the north-western corner of the square and identified as a part of the *floor* of a living house. From the south, west and north it was destroyed by stone foundations of the first Late Bronze Age horizon, and from the east by the ditch of the modern water pipe. The floor was made of levelled and beaten soil, over which a concentration of pottery sherds lay scattered. The latter contained two complete storage vessels (Nos 22-22 and 22-23) and fragments of a third similar vessel and of a footed bowl (No 22-24). A bronze needle (No 22-25) was found beneath vessel 22-23.

Square 23

Structure 23-70. This structure, interpreted as a part of a living house *floor* with a fireplace, was uncovered in the north-eastern corner of the square. To the northwest and southwest it was destroyed by a first Late Bronze Age horizon wall and by the ditch of the modern water pipe, and to the northeast and southeast – by the Early Iron Age structure 23-10. Neither the shape nor the dimensions of this house could be determined. The preserved part of the floor was made of levelled and beaten soil; four whole and three fragmented vessels (Nos 23-72 to 23-77) and many more pottery fragments, pieces of charcoal and ash spots were found scattered over it. A fireplace (No 23-71) of rectangular shape with rounded corners was uncovered on the floor level near the corner of the square; it measured 1.00 by 0.80 m. The hearth of the fireplace consisted of a layer of small to medium size stones plastered with a layer of well purified clay. The backside of the fireplace was delimited by a border 0.10 m. wide and 0.02 – 0.03 m. high. No finds were found on the fireplace except pieces of burnt wall plaster which also lay scattered over the whole floor (*Fig. 7*). Paleobotanical and C-14 samples from wall plasters were taken during the excavations.

Square 26

Pottery concentrations belonging to the second Late Bronze Age horizon were uncovered all over this square under the structures of the first horizon. Unfortunately the lower cultural layer was much disturbed by both the stone walls of the first horizon and the ditch and repair pits of the modern water pipe, and no preserved Koprivlen I structures could be established.

Square 30

Pieces of clay wall-plastering and pottery fragments belonging to the second Late Bronze Age horizon were found scattered beneath and between the stone walls 30-10 and 30-20 of the first horizon.

Square 35

Below the floor level of the stone building and outside it, a second horizon level was uncovered, identified as a part of a living house. Fragments of burnt wall plastering, pottery sherds and bones were found scattered on a floor made of levelled and beaten soil. Unfortunately the shape of the house could not be established because of the destructions caused by the tracing and construction of the modern road to the west and south and by the levelling for the construction of the first horizon stone building to the north.

Trial trench 1A (1998)

A trial trench was excavated at axial point 53 for the purpose of establishing the limits of the Late Bronze Age settlement site, making use of the erosion of the terrain next to the existing country road. The trench revealed a concentration of pieces of plastering, stones and pottery sherds close to its western end which coincided with the western limit of the roadbed. The finds suggest the existence of

remains of Late Bronze Age living houses to the west of the trial trench (beyond the limits of the roadbed). The type of construction is different from that of the first Late Bronze Age horizon, which could imply that the materials from trench 1A should be referred to the second horizon (or, Koprivlen I).

Discussion

The analysis of the archaeological structures leads to the following conclusions. A settlement was constructed on the south river terrace during the Late Bronze Age. Its extent has not been determined definitely because of the limited area of the excavations confined to the roadbed, but it can be stated for certain that in a north to south direction the settlement extended over a length of at least 60 m. The full plans of the living houses could not be retrieved, but there is enough information about the building techniques. The walls were built of poles driven into the ground, interwoven with sticks and plastered with clay. Within the houses there were fireplaces plastered with purified clay. Some of the fireplaces bear traces of more than one plastering which suggests a long period of use.

The circumstances which brought about the end of this settlement remain indeterminate. Subsequently, but still in the Late Bronze Age, a new settlement of radically different architectural design was built over its remains. Several parallel retaining walls running in a northwest to southeast direction were built probably due to a danger of landslides from the elevated terrain in the southwest. Two of these walls, situated at a distance of some 10 m. one from the other, were investigated in the excavated area.² The walls were built of dry stones of medium and large size in two or three contiguous rows, from one to four successive courses being preserved in height. Living houses and possibly also buildings of other character were built on both sides of the walls. The type of construction – with stone foundations and mudbricks, is unique for the Late Bronze Age in Bulgaria. The general plan of the settlement is hard to reconstruct due to the reasons exposed above, but a certain layout is seen in the narrow spaces (streets) separating the buildings. The latter were oval or apsidal in plan, sometimes abutting on the retaining walls. Fireplaces were established in many of the houses, resembling in construction those of the second building horizon, and also some ovens of larger size. Pithoi had been embedded into the ground both within and outside the houses.

The site was used as a sacred place and necropolis during the Early Iron Age. Three graves containing cremation burials were found on the southern side of the long retaining wall. Ritual pits were attested between and around the graves; the fill of these contained debris of the Late Bronze Age settlement. The nature of structure 23-30 remains uncertain, but despite its differences in shape and mode of construction in comparison to the other ritual pits, it is certainly contemporary with the other Early Iron Age cult structures.

III.2. ANALYSIS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

Early Iron Age

Stones and earth from the Late Bronze Age site were used in the construction of the Early Iron Age structures, and earlier materials appear regularly. Therefore, with the exception of the graves, the Early Iron Age structures cannot be regarded as “closed complexes” with synchronous materials. For this reason only the pottery which is certainly not of Late Bronze Age date will be presented here.

Bowls

Bowls with S-shaped profile and two horizontal arched handles. The fabric is average. The surface is grey-black in colour and smoothed (*Fig. 37/1*).

Cups

Cups with oblique mouth and one handle. They usually have three relief projections on the body. The fabric is fine or average with small particles of stone and quartzite in the clay. The surface

²The interpretation of the long walls as retaining ones does not exclude other possible explanations such as defence. Additional arguments are needed however before this idea could be discussed seriously.

is smooth, grey-black in colour. The decoration consists of 1 to 3 rows of fine grooves under the rim, a zigzag line or a band of oblique fine grooves on the body (*Fig. 38*).

Kantharoi

The fabric is fine or average with small particles of stone and quartzite in the clay. The surface is smooth, grey in colour. The decoration is either of fine grooves on the body, between the two handles, forming a "herring-bone" motif, or of parallel incised lines. The space around and beneath the handles is decorated with concentric semi-circles (*Fig. 38/2-7*).

Jugs

The fabric is average with small or middle-sized particles of stone and quartzite in the clay. The surface is roughly smoothed, light brown in colour. A characteristic feature of the Early Iron Age jugs is the light curve between the neck and the body. The decoration consists of cuts or small holes placed on the mouth rim (*Fig. 37/2-4*).

Pots

The fabric is rough, with small or middle-sized particles of stone and ceramics in the paste. The surface is roughly smoothed, brown in colour. The profile is S-shaped, in some cases with two vertical handles on the belly. The decoration consists of cuts or small holes placed on the mouth rim (*Fig. 37/5-6; 36/1*).

Deep storage vessels

The fabric is rough, with small or middle-sized particles of stone, ceramics and organic admixtures in the paste. The surface is roughly smoothed, grey-black in colour. The profile is elongated, S-shaped, with two vertical handles on the belly. The decoration consists of cuts or small holes placed on the mouth rim and a relief band on the belly (*Fig. 36/1*).

Pithoi

Fragments of several pithoi were found. Two of them are of particular interest, being decorated with plastic zoomorphic patterns (*Fig. 41*).

The pots and storage vessels were used as urns in graves Nos 1 and 2.

Except the mentioned recoverable shapes, some more fragments can be referred to the Early Iron Age on the basis of their specific decoration. These include fine or wide groove-like incised lines, classical fluting and the "false corded" decoration (*Fig. 39-40*). A fragment combining all three mentioned techniques is of particular interest (*Fig. 39/8*).

A wheelmade fragment comes from structure 23-20. The fabric is very fine; the colour is dark yellow. The surface is decorated with three paralleled horizontal lines in dark paint (*Fig. 38/1*).

Late Bronze Age

I. Pottery

1. Handmade Pottery

All the Late Bronze Age pottery is handmade with the exception of few wheelmade fragments. The analysis shows the existence of three basic groups of clay:

Fine, well purified clay with few admixtures mainly of mica or, rarely, of small particles of stone. The vessels made of this fabric are black or grey-black in colour. The surface is smoothed and polished, often burnished and covered partially or wholly with graphite.

Average, with admixtures of small and middle-sized particles of stone and rarely of ceramics. The vessels made of this fabric are black or grey-black in colour. The surface is smoothed, rarely burnished.

Coarse, with admixtures of middle-sized or bigger particles of stone, ceramics and organic materials. The vessels made of this fabric are brown or red-brown in colour. The surface is usually rough or imperfectly smoothed.

No strict relation between the type of fabric and the shapes of the vessels could be established. However it seems that the kantharoi were usually made of refined clay, the bowls, cups and jugs – of the average type, while the fabric of the deep pots, storage vessels and pithoi is most often coarse.

Typology of the pottery shapes

The basic handmade pottery shapes are: A – plates, B – bowls, C – cups, D – jugs, E – kantharoi, F – amphorae, G – deep vessels, H – double vessels, I – pithoi, J – lids.

A. Plates

The plates are made of average fabric with admixtures of small particles of stone. The surface is grey or black-grey in colour, smoothed and very rarely – burnished. The number of plate fragments is small in comparison with those from bowls or jugs, but the observation may be due to the limited area of the excavations. According to the shape the following types can be defined:

Type I. Plates with inverted conical shape and straight rim (*Fig. 14/1*).

Type II. Plates with hemispherical shape.

Subtype II.A – with a slightly thinned mouth rim (*Fig. 22/2*).

Subtype II.B – with an outturned mouth rim shaped like a cover-bed (*Fig. 22/1*).

Subtype II.C – with an incurved and thickened mouth rim (*Fig. 11/4; 10/9*).

Type III. Plates with elongated S-shaped profile (*Fig. 11/6*).

Only one fragment of type II.A is decorated with four horizontal bands of parallel incised lines filled with red paste (*Fig. 22/2*). The stratigraphic data show that the dishes of type II.C are characteristic only of the second building horizon, while the other types are met equally in both horizons.

B. Bowls

The bowls are one of the best represented shapes in the Late Bronze Age layers. Their fabric is either fine or average. The colour is grey to black-grey. The surface is slicked and smoothed, often burnished or with traces of graphite covering. None of the bowls found in 1998 and 1999 was decorated. The following types can be established:

Type I. Bowls with an elongated S-shaped profile and a flat bottom. Two horizontal arched handles are attached at the most prominent part of the body; they do not reach higher than the rim level. The diameter of the mouth rim is bigger than the height (*Fig. 15/2; 27/2, 3*).

Type II. Bowls with an elongated S-shaped profile and a flat bottom. Two horizontal arched handles attached at the most prominent part of the body do not reach higher than the rim level. The diameter of the mouth rim is either smaller than or equal to the height (*Fig. 22/1, 2*).

Type III. Bowls with an elongated S-shaped profile and a hollow ring-foot. No handles. The diameter of the mouth rim is either smaller than or equal to the height.

Subtype III.A – the neck is slanting outwards (*Fig. 21/1, 7*).

Subtype III.B – the neck is almost vertical (*Fig. 21/1*).

Type IV. Bowls with inverted conical shape, probably with a hollow ring-foot. The mouth rim is incurved and thickened. A “wishbone” handle was preserved on one of the fragments of this type (*Fig. 11/9*).

The bowls of types III and IV are characteristic of the second building horizon, those of type II of the first building horizon, while type I is common for both horizons.

C. Cups

The cups are usually made of an average fabric with admixtures of small particles of stone; their colour is dark-brown. The surface is roughly smoothed from the outside and rough on the inside. The following types can be differentiated:

Type I. Cups with one handle, an oval body and a short conical neck. The curve from body to the neck is light. There are two subtypes:

Subtype I.A – with a straight rim (*Fig. 15/3-4*).

Subtype I.B – with an obliquely cut rim (*Fig. 15/5; 25/9*).

Type II. Cups with one handle and inverse conical shape (*Fig. 15/1*).

The cups of type I are not decorated, while those of type II are often decorated with either cuts or fossettes under the rim.

D. Jugs

The jugs are made of fine or average fabric with admixtures of small and middle-sized particles of stone. The outside surface is grey to black-grey in colour, smoothed or burnished. There are traces of graphite covering on some of the jugs. The inside surface is roughly smoothed, in some cases even rugged. There are two types according to the mouth rim, which can be cut obliquely or straight.

Type I. Jugs with obliquely cut rim. The handle is raised over the rim level. The transition from body to neck is well expressed, even emphasized.

Subtype I.A – slightly inclined mouth rim (*Fig. 15/10*).

Subtype I.B – classical “cut-away” mouth rim of rectangular shape with rounded angles (*Fig. 17/2*).

The only example of type I.B is decorated with roughly executed parallel horizontal grooves placed above and below the transition from body to neck (*Fig. 17/2*). The jugs of subtype I.A are decorated under the rim and upon the body. The following patterns occur as mouth decoration on jugs of this type: one to three parallel incised lines; one or two incised lines with triangles (drops) hanging from the lower one; one to three parallel lines of dots. The second pattern is most common. Some parallel incised lines underline the transition from body to neck, and under this is developed a geometrical composition of incised lines. All the incised lines are filled with either white or red paste (*Fig. 27*).

Type II. Jugs with straight rim, the handle is slightly raised above the rim level and the transition from body to neck is smooth.

The jugs of type I are significantly more numerous in comparison with those of type II. Type I is represented in both horizons, but the quantity is considerably greater in the first building horizon. The decorative patterns do not display any development between the second and first horizon, with the exception of the red paste incrustation which is mainly found in the first horizon. Type I.B is represented only by jug 16-50 from the second horizon.

E. Kantharoi

The kantharoi are made of fine fabric with admixtures of small particles of stone or mica. Their surface is black-grey or black, smoothed and in many cases – burnished. A fragment from Square 19 which is made of very fine clay without any admixtures and fired under high temperature with oxygen access is exceptional with its light-brown colour. Its inside and outside surface is slicked with a thick graphite coverage of dark grey colour. Both the fabric and the baking are different from the usual local production and the fragment could be regarded as an import. Most of the remaining fragments also display traces of graphite covering on the outside surface, and some even on the upper part of the inside surface. The shape is numerically and typologically constant for both Late Bronze Age horizons – an oval body with a short conical neck and a flat bottom. According to the place of attachment of the two arched vertical handles two types can be specified:

Type I. The handles are attached to the mouth rim (*Fig. 14/5, 6, 8; 23/6*).

Type II. The handles are attached under the mouth rim (*Fig. 14/7; 21/3, 6; 23/1, 5*).

All the kantharoi were decorated with either incised lines or *furchenstich* or dots. The ornamental patterns are situated under the mouth rim and on the body. Usually there are one or more incised or dotted lines under the rim, sometimes with drops hanging from the lowest line. The transition between the body and neck is underlined with incised lines, *furchenstich* or dots, and more complex geometrical compositions are placed below this on the body (*Fig. 14/4-11; 21/5, 6; 23/2-5*). The incised lines and dots were filled with white, red or yellow paste; sometimes all three colours were used simultaneously (*Fig. 14/6*).

F. Amphorae

The amphorae were made of fine or average clay with admixtures of either small particles of stone or mica. Their surface is black or grey-black, smoothed and rarely burnished. There are single cases with traces of graphite covering on the outside surface. Unfortunately, only one amphora could be restored fully, which makes the establishment of a precise typology difficult. A basic type with a short slightly conical neck clearly separated from the body could be established with certainty. The body is globular, with a flat bottom (*Fig. 17/1*). Amphorae with a foot have not been registered. Four

vertical arched handles are usually placed symmetrically on the body of the amphora. The decoration occupies the upper part of the body and was executed by incision or *furchenstich*. The main patterns are the rectangular fields with complex geometric designs or single bands of broad hanging hatched triangles. The incised or *furchenstiched* lines are filled with white or red paste. The amphorae are evenly distributed in both Late Bronze Age horizons, without any noticeable peculiarities in shape and decoration (Fig. 11/5; 12/1).

G. Deep vessels

This category groups the large and deep vessels which were probably intended for cooking or storing of food and other products. All the vessels from this category are made of coarse fabric with admixtures of middle-sized and bigger particles of stone, ceramics and organic materials. The colour is dark-red or brown. The surface in most cases is rather rough, probably deliberately, for a better cohesion in holding. The whole vessels and the better preserved sherds have each two symmetrical vertical arched handles attached to the most prominent part of the body, in the most cases supplemented with two symmetrical plastic knobs.

Two main groups could be discriminated on the basis of the dimensions of the vessels, the one including those with a height of 0.80 – 1.00 m. and a mouth rim diameter of over 0.40 m., the other – those with a height of only about 0.50 m. and a mouth rim diameter of 0.30 – 0.40 m. The function of the vessels in the two groups was possibly different. The following types could be established according to the shape of the vessels:

Type I. Vessels with an elongated S-shaped profile and a mouth rim diameter larger or equal to the maximum diameter (Fig. 19/2).

Type II. Vessels with an elongated S-shaped profile and a mouth rim diameter smaller than the maximum diameter (Fig. 18/2).

Type III. Vessels with a short neck smoothly connected with the rounded shoulders; the mouth rim diameter is smaller than the maximum diameter (Fig. 26/1).

Type IV. Vessels with an expressed division between the neck and body; the mouth rim diameter is smaller than the maximum diameter (Fig. 26/2).

Most of the deep vessels have some decoration on or under the mouth rim – fossettes, cuts, and rarely a horizontal plastic band. A specific ornamental technique are the finger imprints, sometimes additionally ornamented on the inside with nail marks. In some cases the decoration under or on the mouth rim is repeated on the most prominent part of the vessel (Fig. 12/3, 4; 18; 19/2; 20; 26/2; 29/2-5). The plastic bands made by pulling the fingers over the wet surface of the vessel can also be interpreted as a specific ornamental technique.

The vessels of this category are equally distributed in both horizons, without any noticeable particularities of shape and decoration.

H. Double vessels

No whole vessels of this specific Late Bronze Age type could be restored, but some characteristic fragments prove their presence on the site (Fig. 5/8, 10). Stratigraphically they are attested in both horizons.

I. Pithoi

Parts of two pithoi *in situ* and numerous fragments were found in both horizons. Unfortunately, their shape is difficult to restore, but the fragments suggest that the pithoi from Koprivlen repeat both the shape and size of the known examples from Central and Eastern Macedonia.

J. Lids

The lids are either round or oval in shape and have two small openings for hanging. A whole lid from structure 16-50 of the second building horizon has an oval shape and a diameter of 6.8 by 6.5 cm. (Fig. 34/10). None of the known lids was decorated.

Decoration

Decoration techniques

The basic techniques used in the decoration of the Late Bronze Age pottery in Koprivlen are connected to removal – incision, pricking, *furchenstich*, fine or wide grooves, cuts, fossettes. A characteristic feature of the first three techniques is that the removed surface is actually prepared for filling in with white, yellow or red paste. In some of the cases the paste coloured fields delineate a new decorative pattern in the reserved surface of the vessel. Such patterns, for example, are the zigzag bands formed by the free space between two rows of obverse hatched triangles.

The covering of the outside and sometimes also of the inside surface of kantharoi, bowls and jugs with graphite can also be regarded as a specific decorative technique, designed to give the vessel additional metallic lustre. The grey-black shining surface contrasts the light coloured paste filling the incised or pricked patterns, increasing the aesthetic effect.

Another decorative technique is passing of the fingers over the still wet surface of the vessel. In this case narrow relief bands are formed, usually obliquely placed on the body of the vessel.

The relief bands, usually placed below the mouth rim of deep vessels, are also quite current ornaments.

Main decorative patterns

As a whole, the decorative patterns are of a geometric type. Most common are the bands of cuts or fossettes; lines of pricked or dots; incised or *furchenstich* lines, sometimes combined with hanging triangles or drops; zigzag lines; triangles; rectangles; horizontal S-bands. The triangles and S-bands are hatched with incised lines or pricked with dots. A specific decorative pattern are the finger impressions sometimes additionally ornamented on the inside with nail marks.

Main decorative compositions

The decorative compositions are always adapted to the shape of the vessel. The more sophisticated compositions are to be found on kantharoi, jugs and amphorae, the simpler ones on cups, deep vessels and pithoi. The last mentioned shapes are often decorated with bands of fossettes or cuts on or under the mouth rim and on the belly. The finer table ware is decorated much more complicated compositions concentrated in two ornamental fields: below the rim and on the body. The upper part of the decoration usually comprises one to three incised or *furchenstiched* lines, sometimes combined with hanging triangles or “drops”. The compositions on the body are usually restricted to a rectangular field between the two handles (the kantharoi usually have symmetrical compositions on both sides) or may cover the whole body without the handle (as in the case of jugs). The upper line of the rectangular field usually underlines the division of the neck and body. The rectangles are usually framed with groups of parallel lines, and the inside is filled with horizontal S-shapes or opposite triangles with a zigzag field between them, which stands out as the real ornamental pattern, contrasting the triangles filled in with white, red or yellow paste. In the case of S-shapes the triangles between them and the frame represent such reserved patterns. In some cases the rectangular field is hatched with parallel incised and zigzag lines. Another decorative pattern seen on amphorae and jugs consists of a horizontal band of hanging triangles on the upper part of the body.

Different techniques were sometimes used together in the execution of more sophisticated decorative compositions: incision, *furchenstich*, pricking and the filling in of different ornamental fields with pastes of different colour. The last mentioned technique is characteristic only of the second building horizon; so are also the zigzag bands formed by couples of fine grooves and the wide vertical or horizontal grooves.

2. Wheelmade Pottery

Several wheelmade pottery fragments were found during the excavations of the Late Bronze Age site.

1. The first fragment was found at the floor level in Square 26. It is part of the mouth rim of a deep bowl (skyphos) with a diameter of 13.6 cm. The fabric is extremely good, well purified and with no admixtures. The surface is light yellow (ochre) in colour. The decoration is painted with dark red. It

is composed of a horizontal band, 0.2 – 0.3 cm. wide, under the mouth rim, and the pattern called “whorl-shell” in the typology of Furumark applied vertically below the band (*Fig. 30/3*).

2. The second fragment comes from structure 23-50/60. The fabric is very well purified, without any admixtures. The surface is light yellow (ochre) in colour. It is a part of an outturned mouth rim with a diameter of 11.8 cm., probably also from a deep bowl (skyphos). The fragment is painted in brown, the paint covers the whole outside surface and a 0.8 cm. wide band below the rim on the inside (*Fig. 30/4*).

3. The third fragment comes from structure 23-50/60. The fabric is very well purified, without any admixtures. The surface is light yellow in colour. It is a part of the mouth rim of an amphora with a diameter of 16.0 cm. The decoration is painted in black. The pattern is difficult to reconstruct, but it probably covered the entire outside and partly the inside surface. The rim might have been decorated with five transverse painted bands (*Fig. 30/7*).

4. The fourth fragment comes from structure 23-50/60. The fabric is very well purified, with visible admixtures of sand. The surface is grey in colour on both sides. It is a part of the mouth rim of an amphora with a diameter of 13.9 cm. The decoration is painted in black-brown, but the paint is badly preserved and the pattern cannot be reconstructed definitely (*Fig. 30/5*).

5. The fifth fragment was discovered near the structure 25-10. It was made of very well purified clay, without any admixtures. The surface is light red in colour. The preserved part of the decoration painted in dark red permits to reconstruct the “whorl-shell” pattern of A. Furumark (*Fig. 30/1*).

6. Two fragments were recovered from the floor of the building in Square 35. Their fabric is very well purified, without any admixtures. The outside surface is grey in colour, and the inside is covered with dense black-brown slip. The two fragments come from one and the same vessel, but the shape cannot be established. The decoration is painted in dark brown and consists of parallel horizontal lines 0.2 to 0.3 cm. wide and a 0.4 cm. wide wavy line (*Fig. 30/2, 6*).

All the fragments described above come from the first building horizon (Koprivlen II). By their production on a wheel, the quality of the clay and the technique and patterns of the decoration they are completely different from the local handmade pottery. This is obviously a case of imported pottery, the characteristics of which connect it to the best examples of the pottery production in the Mycenaean world.

II. Small Finds

1. Metal Finds

Although not numerous, the metal finds from the Late Bronze Age site at Koprivlen present some of the most common types of bronze tools and weapons.

Arrowheads

Type I. Arrowheads with a single tang. The blade is triangular, with wing-like barbs and a central rib turning into a flat tang. A total of four arrowheads of this type were discovered. The length of the blade varies from 3.5 to 4.5 cm., the maximum width at the barbs – from 1.5 to 1.7 cm., and the total length including the tang – from 5.5 to 6.1 cm. (*Fig. 32/1-4*).

Type II. Arrowheads with two tangs.

Subtype II.A. The blade is triangular, with wing-like barbs and a central rib turning into two flat tangs. A single arrowhead of this type was discovered; its blade is 4.8 cm. long, the maximum width at the barbs is 2.1 cm., and the full length with the tangs is 6.5 cm. (*Fig. 32/6*).

Subtype II.B. The blade is leaf-shaped, with a central rib turning into two long flat tangs. A single arrowhead of this type was discovered; the length of its blade is 2.2 cm., the maximum width 1.5 cm., and the full with the tangs 4.7 cm. (*Fig. 32/5*).

Needles

A whole needle and fragments of four others were discovered, the former in the second building horizon. All the needles have a round section and belong to the type with an eye characteristic for the age. The wholly preserved example is 13.9 cm. long, with an eye length of 0.7 cm. (*Fig. 33*).

Hook

A bronze hook was found in the fill of structure 23-20 (*Fig. 31/1-2*). It could be dated in the Late Bronze Age on the basis of the observation that the fill of this Early Iron Age structure was actually made of Late Bronze Age debris.

Ornaments

A bronze ring with a diameter of 2.0 cm. (*Fig. 31/4*) and two beads with a diameter of 0.6 cm. (*Fig. 31/1-2*) were found in Square 19. All three were made of curved bronze lamellae.

2. Finds of Stone and Flint

Moulds

A piece of a stone mould probably for the casting of a knife comes from among the stones covering an Early Iron Age pit in Square 23. The mould has a rectangular shape with rounded corners; the preserved part is 10.2 cm. long, 7.0 cm. wide and 2.5 cm. thick (*Fig. 31/7*). The knife seems to have been with a one-sided blade and a maximum width of 1.6 cm.

Whetstones

A single whetstone was discovered in Square 19. It has a rectangular shape with rounded corners and dimensions 9.9 by 5.5 by 1.1 cm. The whetting groove runs along the whole length of the stone and is 0.7 cm. wide and 0.3 cm. deep (*Fig. 31/6*).

Arrowheads

A flint arrowhead of a Mycenaean type comes from Square 19. The blade is leaf-shaped, with a maximum width of 1.6 cm. and a preserved length of 3.8 cm. (*Fig. 34/11*).

3. Finds of Bone

The number of bone artefacts is relatively small. Several bodkins could be identified with certainty; their length varies between 5.0 and 6.0 cm. and their width is about 1.0 cm. (*Fig. 35/6, 7*).

4. Finds of Clay

Spindle-Whorls

The spindle-whorls are made of fine or average clays usually with quartzite admixtures. They have been fired to a dark brown or grey colour and the surface is smoothed, without any decoration. The shape and dimensions are constant in the two Late Bronze Age horizons, the diameters vary between 2.0 and 4.0 cm. and the heights between 2.0 and 3.0 cm. Three types could be distinguished according to the shape of the vertical section:

Type I. Spindle-whorls of biconical shape (*Fig. 35/11-17*).

Type II. Spindle-whorls of ovoid shape (*Fig. 35/10*).

Type III. Spindle-whorls of conical shape (*Fig. 35/8-9*).

Weights

The weights discovered in Koprivlen were probably used for fishing. They are made of average clays with admixtures of small and middle-sized stone particles. The surface is roughly smoothed, possibly as a result of long use. The main colour is brown to dark brown. Two main types could be distinguished – with or without a hole for suspending, and several subtypes according to the shape.

Type I. Weights with holes.

Subtype I.A. Oval weights. The orifice is approximately in the centre (*Fig. 34/4-5*).

Subtype I.B. Rectangular weights. The orifice is longitudinal, approximately at the centre of the small side (*Fig. 34/1*).

Subtype I.C. Weights of irregular shape with several holes. Usually these were made of pottery sherds (*Fig. 34/2*).

Type II. Weights without holes.

Subtype II.A. Oval weights, usually made of pottery sherds (*Fig. 34/3, 6, 7*).

Small cups

A considerable quantity of small cups was discovered during the excavations. Their height is up to 3.0 cm., with a mouth rim diameter of up to 4.0 cm. The cups were made of fine or average clays with small particles of quartzite or stone as admixtures. The surface is grey, roughly smoothed, sometimes crude. Their purpose remains unclear, but their number is constant in the two Late Bronze Age horizons. Two types were distinguished according to the shape:

Type I. Small cups with sharp bottom and conical body (Fig. 35/1, 3).

Type II. Small cups of ovoid shape (Fig. 35/1, 3).

Anthropomorphic figurines

Only one figurine was found during the excavations in the stone building in Square 35 which belongs to the first Late Bronze Age horizon (Koprivlen II). The figurine resembles a five-point star and seems to represent a male figure with suggested sex attributes. The height is 4.5 cm., the width of the torso 1.6 cm., the maximum width 2.3 cm. (Fig. 34/9).

III. 3. CHRONOLOGY OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE BUILDING HORIZONS

The examination of the separate cultural elements represented in the two building horizons at Koprivlen leads to their definite dating in the Late Bronze Age.

The layout and settlement pattern of the first building level settlement (Koprivlen II) have exact Late Bronze Age parallels in the south. Similar foundations of long stone walls with living houses and other buildings erected around them have been described at Thermon, Iolkos and at other sites.³ The excavations in Greek Macedonia have revealed similar architectural patterns at the tells of Kastanas, Assyros, Thessaloniki, at Thasos and elsewhere.⁴ The apsidal and oval buildings are also common for the Late Bronze Age cultures in Macedonia. Close parallels to the structures uncovered at Koprivlen can be found in the same Late Bronze Age tells at Kastanas, Assyros, Dikili Tash, Thessaloniki, etc.⁵ Mud-brick walls are also a typical feature of the Late Bronze Age cultures developing to the south of Koprivlen.⁶

The bronze arrowheads found at Koprivlen have not so far found exact parallels. Of the five examples from Kastanas, the nearest analogue to the Koprivlen finds is an arrowhead from horizon 15, which belongs to type VI b in the classification of Buchholz and dates to the LH III period.⁷

In a wider context, and leaving aside the specific flat tang, the arrowheads of type I find numerous parallels in the Mycenaean area and the contemporary civilizations of Egypt and Asia Minor. Similar examples, but with a round tang, from two Mycenaean graves at the cemetery near Prosymna, were attributed by Blegen to type I and dated in the LH III period.⁸ The arrowheads from Koprivlen resemble the Mycenaean arrowheads of type I dated by Snodgrass in the Late Bronze Age.⁹ This type of arrowheads is close to Buchholz' type VIIc, dated by him to LH II – IIIC.¹⁰ In the typology of R. Avilla the arrowheads of type I from Koprivlen are close to group IIe which he dates in LH IIB – IIC.¹¹

Outside Greece, type I finds parallels at Troy VI and VII, where they are considered as imports and are compared to prototypes from the shaft graves at Mycenae and from the Hittite level at Alishar.¹² Bronze arrowheads of similar shape have also been found at Bogazkoy in Asia Minor¹³ and in Egypt.¹⁴

³ Mazarakis-Ainian 1989.

⁴ Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1982a: 253; Wardle 1980; Andreou, Kotsakis 1996.

⁵ Mazarakis-Ainian 1989; Seferiades M. 1985, Andreou, Kotsakis 1996.

⁶ Mazarakis-Ainian 1989.

⁷ Hochstetter 1987: 26, Taf. 2.

⁸ Blegen 1937: 340-342.

⁹ Snodgrass 1964: 144-145.

¹⁰ Buchholz 1962: Abb. 7, 14, 15.

¹¹ Avila 1983: 111-112, Taf. 28.

¹² Koppenhoffer 1995: Abb. 6/2; Blegen et al 1953: 270, Pl. 297, 36-377.

The numerous parallels suggest for the Koprivlen arrowheads a date in the LH II and III periods of the Late Bronze Age. A similar dating is also feasible for the flint arrowhead found in Square 23, which belongs to the common Late Mycenaean type of flint arrowhead.¹⁵

The bronze needles found at Koprivlen are not so sensitive chronologically. The needles with an eye of this relatively simple type are common from the Early Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age in the vast region including the Aegean, Anatolia and the Balkans.¹⁶

The mould for a knife found in Square 23 finds parallels at Kaymenska Chuka dated to 1230-1160 B.C.¹⁷ Knives of this type are known from grave No 1 in the Late Bronze Age cemetery at Sandanski, dated to LH IIIC (excavations by V. Petkov and the author) and from the Late Bronze Age graves in the cemetery near Thasos.¹⁸

The pottery complex from Koprivlen I and Koprivlen II displays the shapes and decoration typical of the Late Bronze Age cultures spread generally to the north of the Mycenaean civilization and in particular in South-Western Thrace. One of the most common shapes is the kantharos. The whole and fragmented examples from Koprivlen have a flat bottom, ovoid body, conical neck and two handles raised above the mouth rim. This shape is characteristic for the Late Bronze Age cultures in the Balkans.¹⁹ The kantharos decorated with incised geometric patterns is typical for the Late Bronze Age pottery complex of Macedonia. Close analogies to shapes and decoration of the Koprivlen vessels are known from the Late Bronze Age levels of the tells in Central and Eastern Macedonia: horizons 18 – 14 at Kastanas,²⁰ Assiros,²¹ the Axios valley,²² and also from the Central Balkans,²³ the so-called Zimnicea-Plovdiv-Cherkovna group,²⁴ the Tei and Verbicioara cultures.²⁵

The filling of the incised ornaments with white paste is among the characteristic features of the decorated pottery from Koprivlen. This decorative technique is called by Heurtley "the third ornamental style".²⁶ The filling with white paste is already a typical feature of the decorative techniques in the Early Bronze Age. In the Late Bronze Age, especially on the lower Strymon, Nestos and Axios, yellow and red pastes were used for this purpose along with the white.²⁷ Such polychrome decoration is attested in both horizons at Koprivlen. The fine wares at Koprivlen often bear traces also of graphite covering. This specific technique is characteristic of the Late Bronze Age in Eastern Macedonia, where similarly to Koprivlen the bands between the incised ornaments were covered with graphite, while some pottery shapes (e. g. bowls) were wholly covered with graphite on the outside and had a single band drawn under the mouth rim on the inside.²⁸

The proposed general dating of the two horizons at Koprivlen to the Late Bronze Age seems indisputable. Their exact chronological position within the Late Bronze Age could be defined more accurately on the basis of the imported Mycenaean pottery on one hand, and through the analogies with the well stratified layers of Kastanas on the other.

Second Building Horizon (Koprivlen I)

The chronological position of this horizon can be defined more precisely by a comparative analysis of the pottery with the well-stratified levels at Kastanas. The most characteristic feature of the pottery complex of Koprivlen I, clearly distinguished from that of the later horizon, is the decoration

¹³ Boehmer 1972: taf. XVI-XXIX.

¹⁴ Petrie 1917: R 195-199.

¹⁵ Buchholz 1962.

¹⁶ Hochstetter 1987: 29 and the cited parallels; Hood 1982: Fig. 295, p. 660 with the cited parallels.

¹⁷ Stefanovich, Bankoff 1988.

¹⁸ Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1982a: Pl. 25.

¹⁹ Hänsel 1976; Morintz 1978.

²⁰ Hochstetter 1984: Taf. 8/7; 13/3-5; 18/1; 20/1-2; 22/8; 35/1-2; 39/10; 47/1-3.

²¹ Wardle 1980: Fig. 11.

²² Mitrevski 1995: 74.

²³ Stojić 1997.

²⁴ Bonev 1988: 55; Hänsel 1976: 76; Hochstetter 1982: 110.

²⁵ Leahu 1966; Morintz 1978.

²⁶ Heurtley 1939: 95.

²⁷ Heurtley 1939: 95, Fig. 92/a, d; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1982: 234-235; Wardle 1980: 247.

²⁸ Grammenos 1979; Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1982: 234-235.

with fine incised lines or wide grooves (Fig. 13/16; 16). A decoration of fine incised lines forming a zigzag band, similar to the examples from Koprivlen, is attested in the earliest Late Bronze Age level at Kastanas – 19.²⁹ A kantharos from the same level decorated with parallel vertical grooves is also similar to examples from Koprivlen.³⁰ It should be mentioned that grooves (but oblique ones) reappear in Kastanas only in level 13 which is dated in LH IIIC.³¹ The analogies between the two horizons are not yet representative enough to warrant a definite affirmation of their chronological identity, especially in view of the restricted quantity of material from Kastanas 19. However the combined data from Koprivlen and Kastanas seems to permit a correction of the opinion that the grooved decoration made its appearance in Central and Eastern Macedonia only in the end of the Late Bronze Age.³² Obviously in terms of Late Bronze Age chronology its appearance should be sought much earlier, and not necessary in connection with influences from the north.

First Building Horizon (Koprivlen II)

The imported Mycenaean pottery should be considered as the most reliable criterion for establishing the chronology of Koprivlen II.³³ The most precise chronological position is that of the skyphos fragment decorated with a “whorl-shell” pattern – Furumark No 284 (Fig. 30/3). According to the latest studies on decorated Mycenaean pottery the “whorl-shell” pattern appears on skyphoi in the LH IIIA2 and IIIB1 periods.³⁴ Other scholars specify that the “vertical whorl-shell” on skyphoi is more typical of the early phase of LH IIIB, especially when the upper part of the pattern is shaped like a ring, which is the case with the Koprivlen fragment.³⁵ A similar pattern is seen on a skyphos from Mycenae dated to the middle phase of LH IIIB.³⁶ In the central Peloponnesian areas of the Mycenaean world the combination between this shape and decoration would be dated in early to middle phase of LH IIIB.

In North Greece, the earliest Mycenaean imports date from LH I and II, and they spread to the interior of Central Macedonia (Kastanas, Assiros) from coastal settlements like Torone in Chalcidice in LH IIIA2 – IIIB1.³⁷ At Kastanas, the first few Mycenaean sherds appear in horizons 18 and 19, dated K. Podzuweit in LH IIIA2. A considerably greater quantity of imported pottery was found in the horizons 16 to 14 which are of LH IIIB date, while the subsequent horizons contained LH IIIC imports.³⁸ At Assiros, Mycenaean pottery is found in relatively small quantities in levels preceding phase 9. From that phase on the quantity of Mycenaean sherds increases, their earliest dates being in LH IIIA2 – IIIB.³⁹

In Eastern Macedonia, relatively small quantities of Mycenaean pottery have been found at Statmos Angista (dated in LH IIIA2 – IIIB – IIIC),⁴⁰ in the necropolises of Thasos,⁴¹ in tumulus graves near Potamoi and Exohi (from LH IIIC),⁴² and at some other sites.⁴³ Generally speaking, the situation is similar to that in Central Macedonia, the LH IIIB period emerging as the most probable time of a wider distribution of Mycenaean pottery in Eastern Macedonia.

In the case of Koprivlen some retardation should be allowed owing to the geographical position of the site which is situated further to the north, and to a probable longer life of such obviously valuable imports. Therefore the early LH IIIB period should be accepted as a probable *terminus post*

²⁹ Hochstetter 1984: Tafel 1/1, 2.

³⁰ Hochstetter 1984: Tafel 12/10.

³¹ Hochstetter 1984: Tafel 62/7; 64/5, 10.

³² Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1992: 814-815.

³³ I would like to thank once again Dr. R. Jung for the kind help in the analyses of the Mycenaean pottery.

³⁴ Mountjoy 1986: 91, fig.110/1; 117, Fig.143/2, 5, 13.

³⁵ Schonefeld, 1988: 153-211, Fig. 3-4.

³⁶ Mountjoy 1976: 87-90, Fig. 6/44.

³⁷ Cambitoglou, Papadopoulos 1993: 295-296.

³⁸ Podzuweit 1979: 1985.

³⁹ Wardle 1993: 126-128.

⁴⁰ Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1980a: pl. 16, 17.

⁴¹ Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1992: 815.

⁴² Grammenos 1979: 71.

⁴³ Koukouli-Chrysanthaki 1992: fig.151.

quem for the imported pottery at Koprivlen and respectively for the first building horizon (phase Koprivlen II).

From the handmade pottery, some chronological indication is offered by the jugs with cut-away neck decorated with incised lines under the mouth rim. Heurtley considers this combination a "later" development within the Late Bronze Age.⁴⁴ The pottery from Koprivlen has exact parallels among the finds from the tells at Saratse and Vardaroftza.⁴⁵ At Kastanas, this combination of shape and decoration is typical for horizon 14, if we judge from the illustrated materials. Jugs with cut-away necks decorated with a single incised line under the rim are attested in horizon 14b ("Haupthof"),⁴⁶ with two incised lines – in horizon 14b ("Antenhaus") and 14a,⁴⁷ and with three incised lines – in horizon 14a.⁴⁸ A sherd similar to the fragments from Koprivlen is illustrated among the finds from horizon 14a in the "Einzelhaus".⁴⁹ The mentioned analogies suggest a contemporaneity between Koprivlen II and Kastanas 14.

It is obvious that both Koprivlen I and II belong to the Late Bronze Age. The comparison of the finds from Koprivlen and Kastanas leads to the establishment of the following chronological parallels:

Koprivlen I – Kastanas horizon 19;

Koprivlen II – Kastanas horizon 14.

In terms of Late Helladic chronology, considering both the dating of the Mycenaean imports from Koprivlen and that of the layers at Kastanas,⁵⁰ a synchronization of Koprivlen I with Late Helladic I – II, and of Koprivlen II with Late Helladic IIIB could be suggested. The absolute dates implied would be c. 1600 – 1510/1500 B.C. for Koprivlen I, and c. 1340/1330 – 1185/1180 B.C. for Koprivlen II.⁵¹

III. 4. CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

The cultural characterization of the Koprivlen I and II assemblages is hampered by the lack of contemporary sites investigated in the region. Late Bronze Age settlements situated on slopes or river terraces have been recorded near Ablanitsa, Debren and Brushten during field surveys along the left bank of the Nestos.⁵² In our opinion the cremation tumulus graves near Satovcha and Kochan in the west slopes of the Rhodopes⁵³ should be related to the Late Bronze Age culture of the Rhodopes and not with the Nestos valley. The known sites in the valley of the Middle Nestos remain insufficient to warrant a reliable solution to the problem of the cultural identification of the Late Bronze Age settlement at Koprivlen. The problem could be examined in a broader geographical context, including the valley of the Middle Strymon with the sites at Kaymenska Chuka and Levunovo and the cemetery in Sandanski. A brief review of the excavation results at these sites will precede the discussion of the general implications.

The Necropolis in Sandanski

The necropolis situated under the Early Christian basilica in the town of Sandanski has been excavated since 1997 by S. Alexandrov and V. Petkov. Until 1999, a total number of eight graves were studied in an excavated area of 60 sq. m. under the southern aisle of the basilica. Two groups of graves were distinguished, separated by a stone assemblage. The first group consists of five graves, and the second of three. As a part of the funerary rituals accompanying the burials, pottery vessels were broken and their fragments were scattered in the earth over the graves and especially in and around the stone structure. Two bronze artefacts were also found in this structure – a double axe and a

⁴⁴ Heurtley 1939: 95-96.

⁴⁵ Heurtley 1939: Fig. 93/g; 85/d, h.

⁴⁶ Hochstetter 1984: Taf. 51/13.

⁴⁷ Hochstetter 1984: Taf. 40/12; 56/8.

⁴⁸ Hochstetter 1984: Taf. 56/9.

⁴⁹ Hochstetter 1984: Taf. 58/11.

⁵⁰ Hochstetter 1982.

⁵¹ Warren, Hankey 1989: 168.

⁵² Domaradzki et al. 1999: 9.

⁵³ Gergova 1989.

biconical bead. All the graves contained extended inhumation burials with a predominant south to north orientation. The corpse was usually surrounded by stones, those around the head being of much larger size. The dead were buried with their personal possessions – bronze beads, finger rings, a necklace of bronze and limestone elements, etc. The burial offerings were usually placed near the head and consisted of between one and five pottery vessels. These were distributed between the eight graves in the following manner: grave No 1 – three vessels; grave No 2 – three vessels; grave No 3 – three vessels; grave No 4 – four vessels and a foot; grave No 5 – one vessel; grave No 6 – one vessel; grave No 7 – one vessel; or a total number of 18 vessels and a foot from another one. With the exception of grave No 4, where two footed bowls and the foot of a third one were found, the other graves contained only single specimens of each pottery shape.

The vessels placed as grave offerings were made of fine or average clays, fired to a dark grey or black colour. The surface was smoothed, rarely burnished. The most common shape is the kantharos, represented with five vessels. The footed bowls are represented by three whole vessels and a foot fragment, the bowls with a flat bottom are three, the small cups – three, the small jugs – two, and there are also a single jug with cut-away neck, an amphora and an “alabastron”. Most of the vessels are undecorated with the exception of two of the kantharoi on which there are finger imprints.

The pottery fragments scattered in and around the stone structure belong for the greater part to vessels of medium and large size. The fabric is average or coarse, with admixtures of small stone particles; the surface is coarse, rarely smoothed. The mouth of the deep vessels is often decorated with an applied plastic band. A few sherds are decorated with carelessly executed incised lines.

The metal finds are only of bronze and include personal belongings found in the graves (a finger ring, a bead, spiral pendants, “buttons”), and a part of a double axe and a biconical bead found in the stone structure.

The analysis of the burial practices, the funerary offerings and the analogies with the adjacent regions date the necropolis to the end of the Late Bronze Age (12th – 11th c. B.C.). The necropolis is probably connected with a settlement of the same age established in the 1980s under the western part of the modern city.⁵⁴

Kaymenska Chuka

The settlement tops a “commanding height” some 100 m. above the flood plain of the Strymon about 5 km southeast of Blagoevgrad. The excavations were carried out between 1993 and 1998 and revealed the remains of a two-storied stone building with rectangular ground plan measuring 18 by 11 m. The walls were about 2 m. thick, the space between the two faces being filled with rubble of small and medium size. A staircase made of stone slabs and about 1 m. wide connected the two floors. The building has been interpreted tentatively as “an emporion or a storage and distribution centre” or as “a ruler’s residence, controlling the commercial and other activities in the area”.⁵⁵

The finds from the building include pottery, a stone mould and several metal objects. The pottery is most numerous, including fine ware like jugs with cut-away necks, single handed cups, kantharoi, footed bowls and “Kugel” amphorae. The decoration is rare, just a few sherds have incised ornaments filled with white paste.⁵⁶ A distinctive flat groove on the transition from the neck to the shoulder was noted as characteristic feature of the amphorae. Three “matt-painted” fragments were also found. The coarse ware is represented by pithoi of different shapes and size.⁵⁷

Parallels to the pottery from Kaymenska Chuka have been suggested in the Late Bronze Age sites of Northern Greece, in the Brnica group in the Central Balkans, and in the Zimnicea-Plovdiv complex. Among the long series of Late Bronze Age cultures in the Balkans listed (Verbicioara, Tei, Coslogeni, Dubovac – Zuto Brdo, etc.) the North Greek analogies seem most convincing.⁵⁸ An absolute date of c. 1230 – 1160 B.C. has been suggested for the site.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Gergova 1995.

⁵⁵ Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998: 279.

⁵⁶ Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998: 274, Fig. 24-30.

⁵⁷ Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998: 275-276.

⁵⁸ Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998: 278.

⁵⁹ Stefanovich, Bankoff 1998: 279.

The Sanctuary near Levunovo

The site is situated on a hill dominating the Strymon valley. The results of trial excavations suggest that the sanctuary appeared in the Late Bronze Age. The published finds⁶⁰ allow a synchronization of this layer with the settlement at Koprivlen.

The list of Late Bronze Age sites in the area could be supplemented with those at Marikostinovo, Kurnalovo, Petrovo and others recorded during field surveys.⁶¹ The published materials from the site Marena by Marikostinovo are contemporary with those from Koprivlen. Graphite covering on pottery sherds was observed in most of these Late Bronze Age sites.⁶²

Discussion

The analysis of the collected data strongly suggests the development of a distinct culture along the middle Strymon and Nestos valleys during the Late Bronze Age. It is characterized, at least from the LH III B period on, with the appearance of stone architecture and the use of stone foundations, developed settlement patterns, apsidal or oval living houses and buildings. The metal arms and ornaments are typical for the age, but new, local types of arrowheads appear apparently under Mycenaean influence.⁶³ The direct contacts with the Mycenaean civilization, especially in the LH IIIB period, are attested by the Mycenaean pottery imports, some of which are of quality suggesting origin in the Peloponnesos. The appearance of stone architecture, the use of stone foundations and mud-bricks might also be attributed to Mycenaean influence or imitation, but the initial stage of the investigation does not permit more definite conclusions in this respect.

The ceramic production shows a typical sequence of Late Bronze Age features, shapes and trends, like the domination of the incised decoration in LH IIIB and its gradual disappearance in LH IIIC. There are however some peculiarities which appear also in the neighbouring area to the south, near the Aegean coast and around the lower courses of the Strymon and Nestos. The evident identity of pottery shapes, decorative patterns and production techniques warrants the assumption that a distinct early Thracian archaeological culture developed along both the middle and lower Strymon and Nestos during the Late Bronze Age, and we are tempted to call that provisionally the *Koprivlen culture*. The Strymon – Nestos area was however in direct contact with Central Macedonia and the Axios valley. If we apply the term “archaeological culture” strictly, these three regions would represent three distinct archaeological cultures. However, as the common features prevail conspicuously in their cultural identity, we are inclined to consider them rather as three variants of one and the same archaeological culture. Within the wider geographical scope of this large cultural area, the regions along the middle and lower Strymon and Nestos should be considered as its “eastern” variant, in which the eponymous early Thracian site at Koprivlen evidently played a significant enough role. This statement seems justified in view of the cultural singularity of the site as revealed by the rescue excavations. The extraordinary character of Koprivlen, emphasized by its geographical position and possibly connected with functions of a commercial character, was further enhanced and developed in the first millennium B.C. as indicated by the excavations of the Thracian settlement centre situated to the north of the Late Bronze Age site.

⁶⁰ Domaradzki 1986a: 97-103, Fig. 10/1, 4, 5, 8, 9.

⁶¹ Gergova 1995: 32-34.

⁶² Gergova 1995: Fig. 11-12.

⁶³ The arrowheads from Koprivlen find no parallels in the Central Balkans, which sustains their interpretation as a new local type. Cp. Parović-Peshikan 1995: 4-24.

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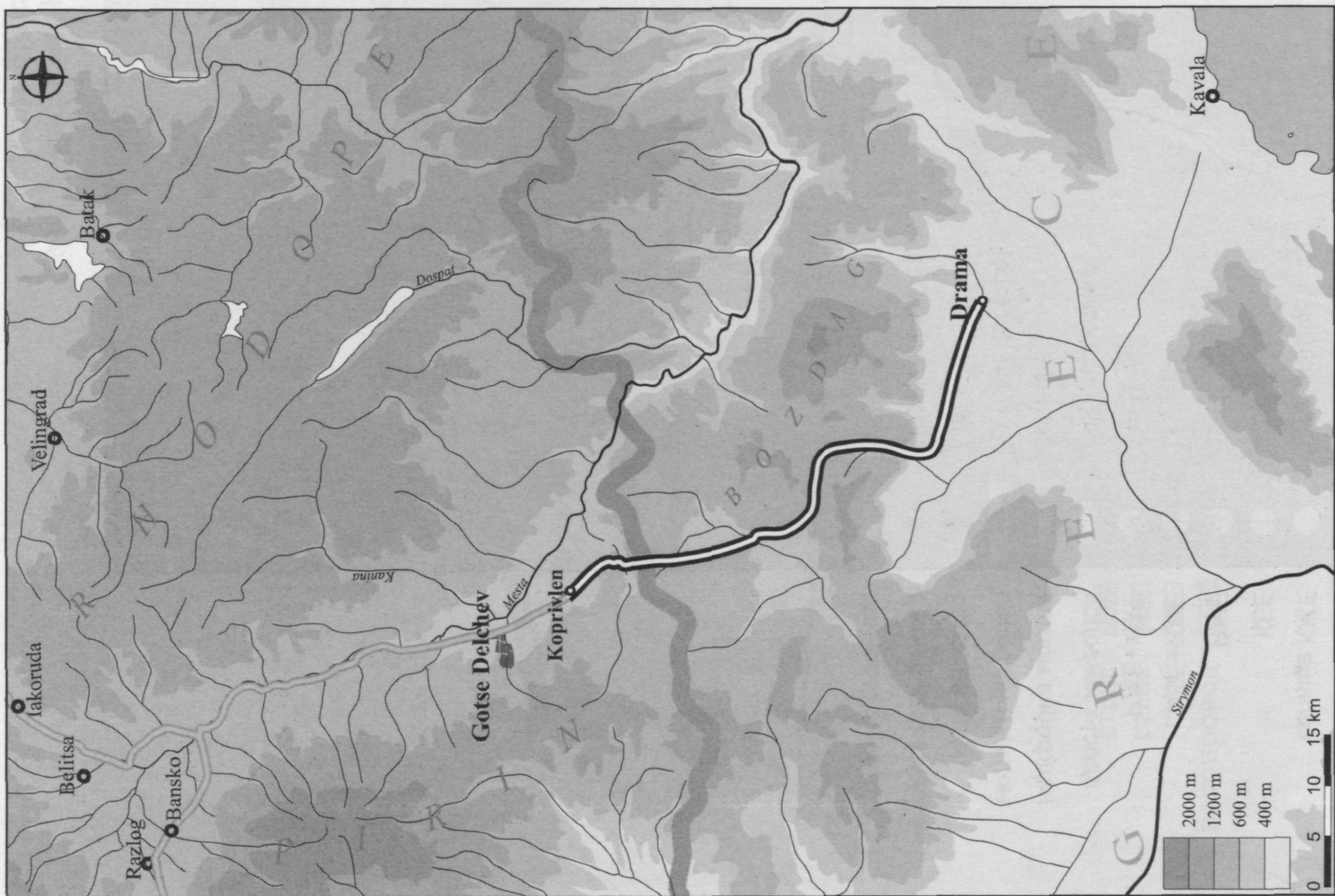
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Abbreviations

AA: *Archäologischer Anzeiger. Beiblatt zum Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts.*
ABSA: *Annual of the British School at Athens.*
AJA: *American Journal of Archaeology.*
AJPh: *American Journal of Philology.*
AM: *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Athenische Abteilung.*
BAR: *British Archaeological Reports, Oxford.*
BCH: *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellenique.*
BSFN: *Bulletin de la Société Française de Numismatique.*
CRAI: *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.*
JDAI: *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts.*
JRGZM: *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanische Zentralmuseums, Mainz.*
MAA: *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica.*
MEFR: *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française de Rome. Paris.*
PAS: *Prähistorische Archäologie in Südosteuropa.*
PBF: *Prähistorische Bronzefunde, München.*
PZ: *Prähistorische Zeitschrift, Berlin.*
RE: *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft.*
SIMA: *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology. Göteborg.*
ThA: *Thracia Antiqua.*

AOP: *Археологически открития и разкопки.*
ГАМП: *Годишник на археологическия музей в Пловдив.*
ГДА НБУ: *Годишник на Департамент Археология, Нов български университет.*
ГИБИ: *Гръцки извори за българската история. София.*
ГМСБ: *Годишник на музеите от Северна България.*
ГНАМ: *Годишник на народния археологически музей в София.*
ГНАМП: *Годишник на народния археологически музей в Пловдив.*
ГПНБ: *Годишник на Пловдивската народна библиотека.*
ГСУ ГГФ: *Годишник на Софийския университет, Геолого-географски факултет.*
ГСУ ФЗФ: *Годишник на Софийския университет, Факултет западни филологии.*
ГСУ ФФ: *Годишник на Софийския университет, Филологически факултет.*
ИАИ: *Известия на археологическия институт, София.*
ИБАИ: *Известия на българския археологически институт, София.*
ИБМ: *Известия на българските музеи.*
ИИД: *Известия на историческото дружество.*
ИИМКн: *Известия на Историческия музей в Кюстендил.*
ИМЮБ: *Известия на музеите от Южна България.*
ИМЮИБ: *Известия на музеите от Югоизточна България.*
ИНМВ: *Известия на народния музей във Варна.*
ИПр: *Исторически преглед, София.*
МПК: *Музеи и паметници на културата, София.*
ПГПиГК: *Предприятие за геофизични проучвания и геоложко картиране.*
РП: *Разкопки и проучвания, София.*
РСб: *Родопски сборник.*
СБНУНК: *Сборник за народни умотворения, наука и книжнина, София.*
СпБАН: *Списание на Българската академия на науките, София.*
Трудове на ИХМ: *Трудове на института по хидрология и метеорология.*

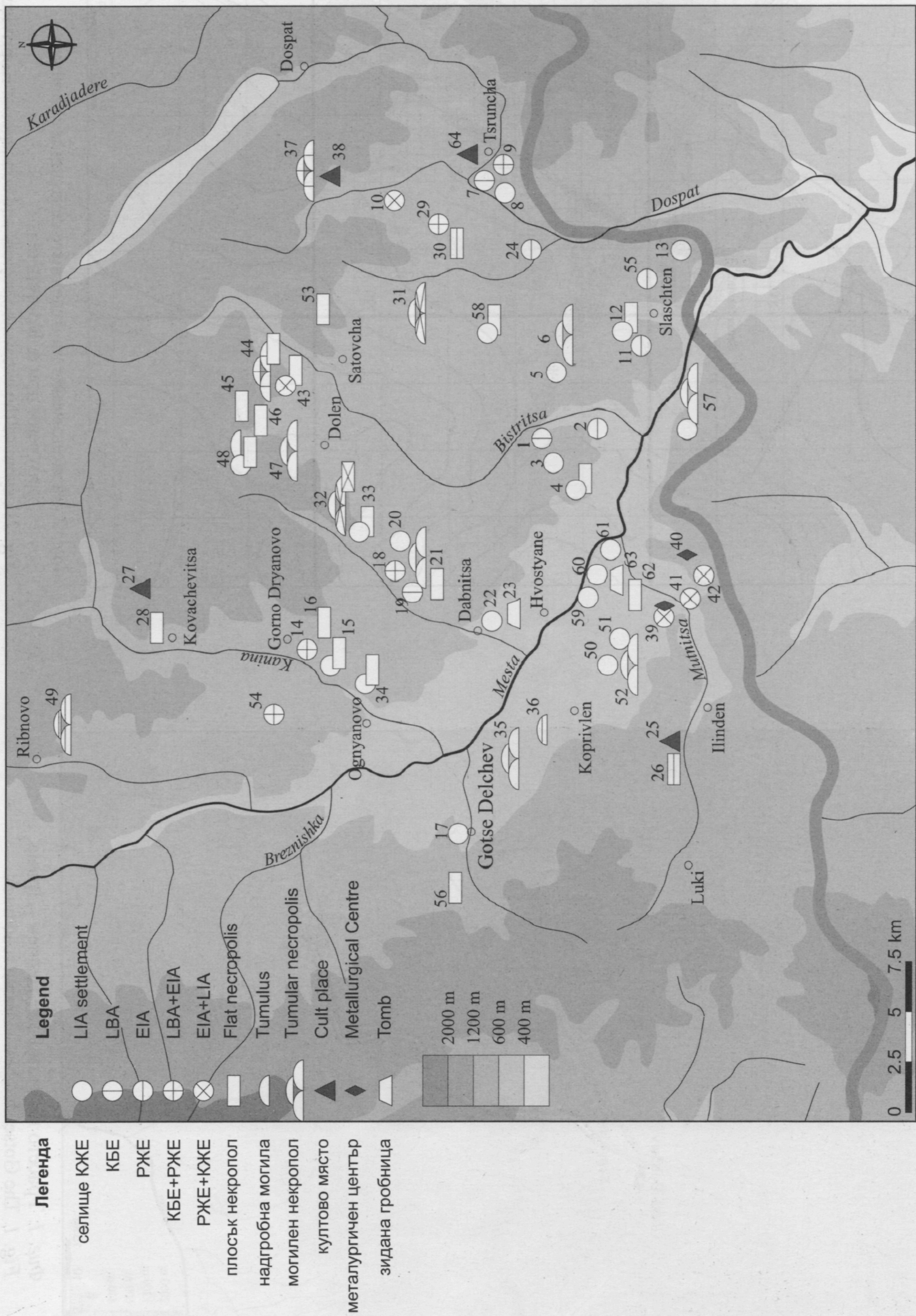
ΑΔ: *Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον. Αθηναι.*
ΑΕΜΘ: *Το Αρχαιολογικό έργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη. Θεσσαλονίκη.*
ΑΕ: *Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς.*
ΑΕΠ: *Ἀρχαῖες Ἑλληνικὲς Πόλεις.*



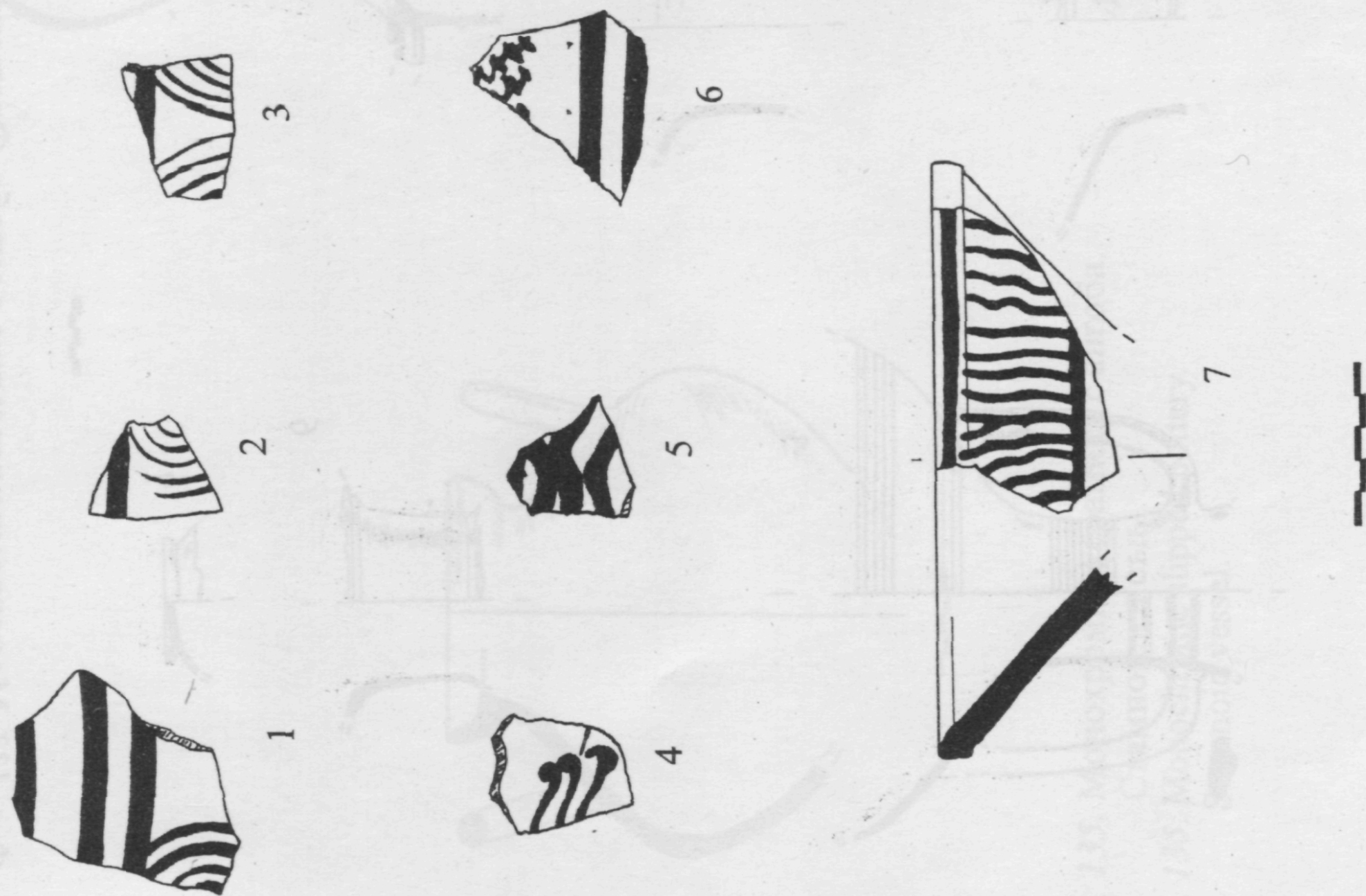
Фиг. 1. Трасето на пътя Гоце Делчев - Драма.
Fig. 1. The Gotse Delchev - Drama road track.



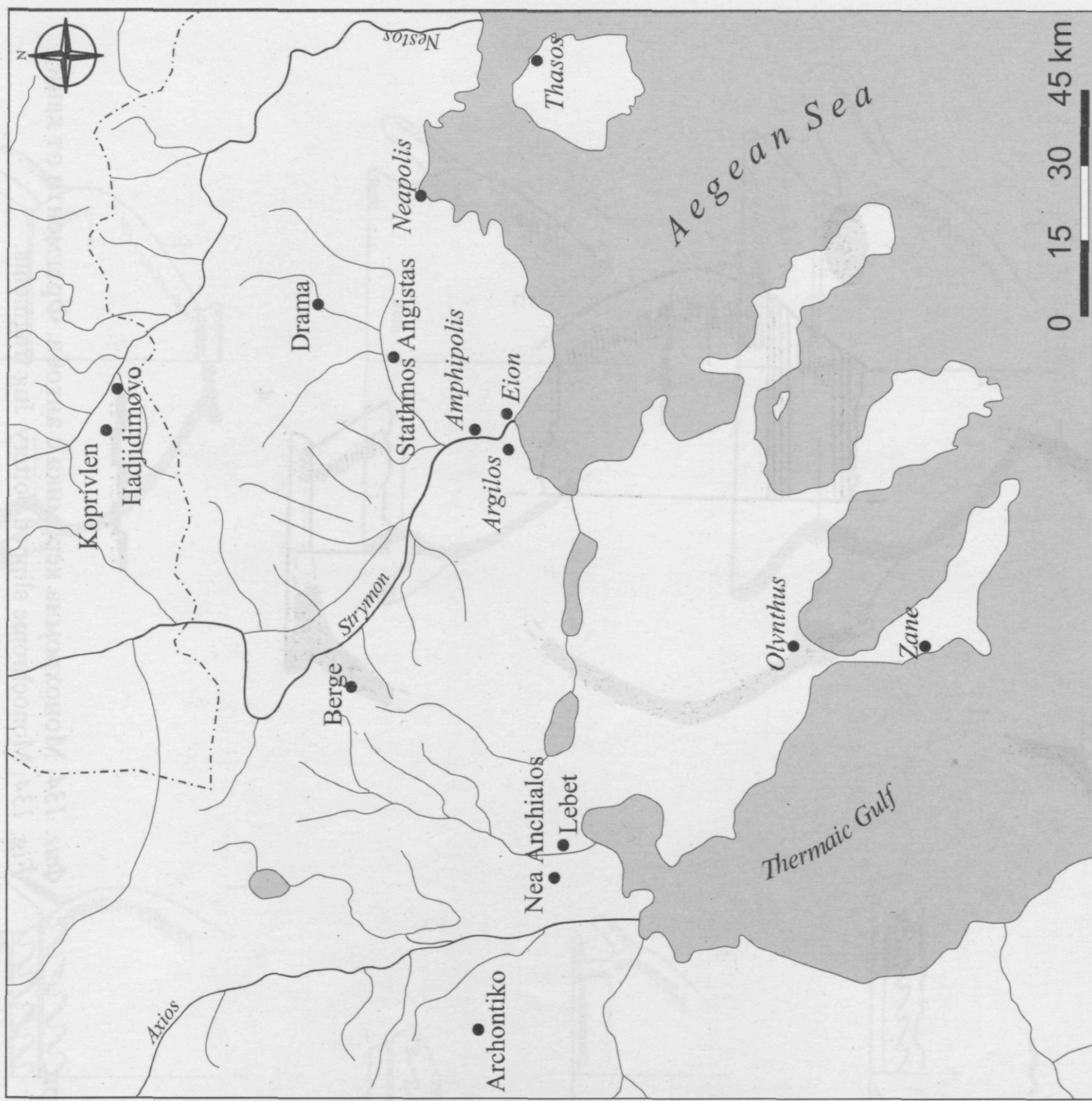
Фиг. 2. Разположение на отделните сектори и сондажи, проучени при с. Копривлен.
Fig. 2. Layout of the excavated sectors and sondages at Koprivlen.



Фиг. 3. Карта на археологическите обекти в района на Средна Места.
Fig. 3. A map of archaeological sites in the Middle Mesta region.



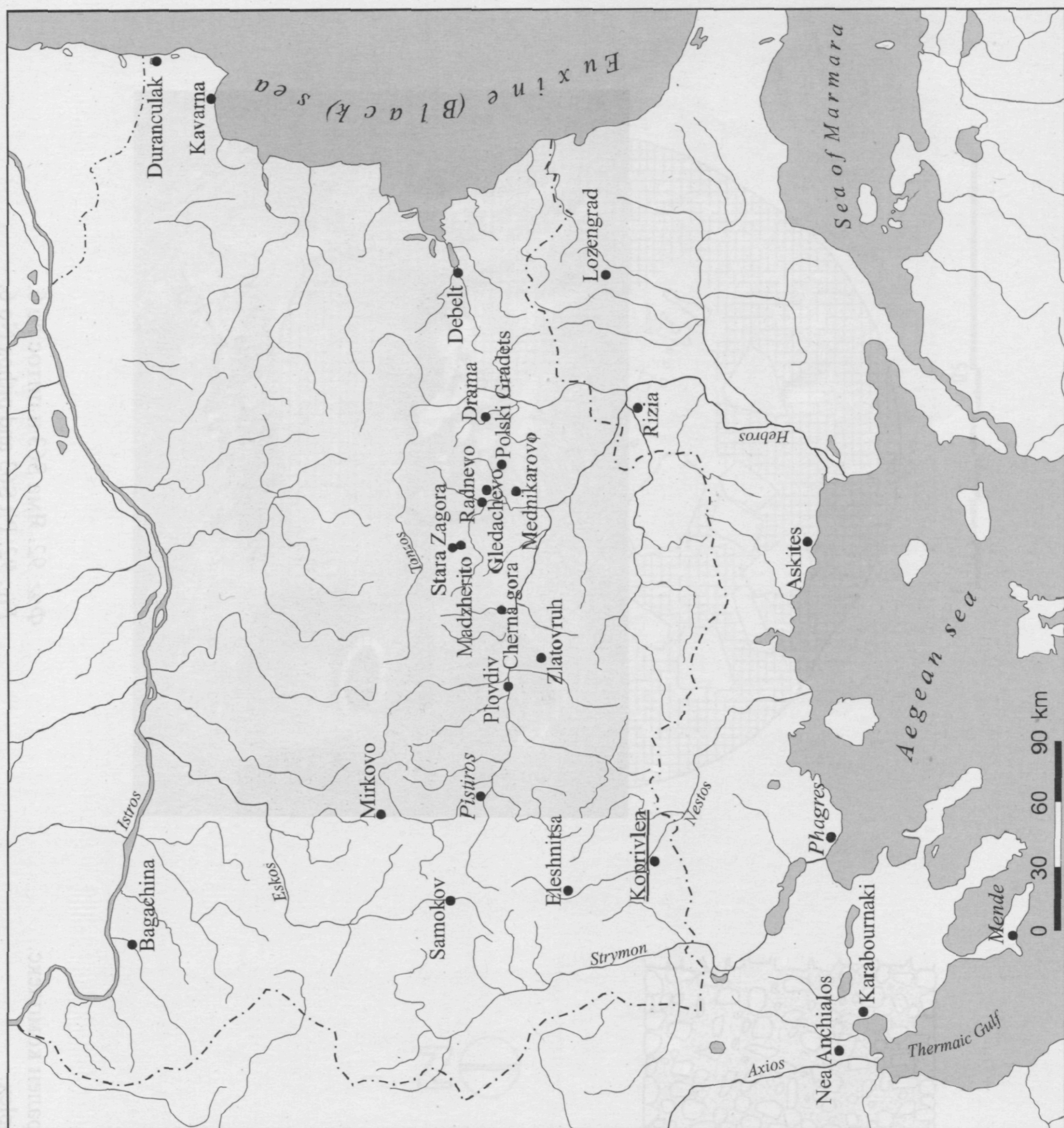
Фиг. 131. Геометрична украса върху съдове от Сектор "Юг".
Fig. 131. Geometric decoration on vessels from Sector "South".



Фиг. 132. Карта на разпространението на керамиката с геометрична украса.
Fig. 132. Map showing finds of pottery with geometric decoration.



Фиг. 93. Керамични дарове от яма S74.
Fig. 93. Pottery offerings from Pit S74.



Фиг. 94. Карта на ямните комплекси.
Fig. 94. Map showing locations of pit sanctuaries.



Фиг. 283. Копривлен, обект 1. Сектор "Север". Поглед от възвишението "Св. Георги".

Fig. 283. Koprivlen, site 1. Sector "North". View from the St George height.



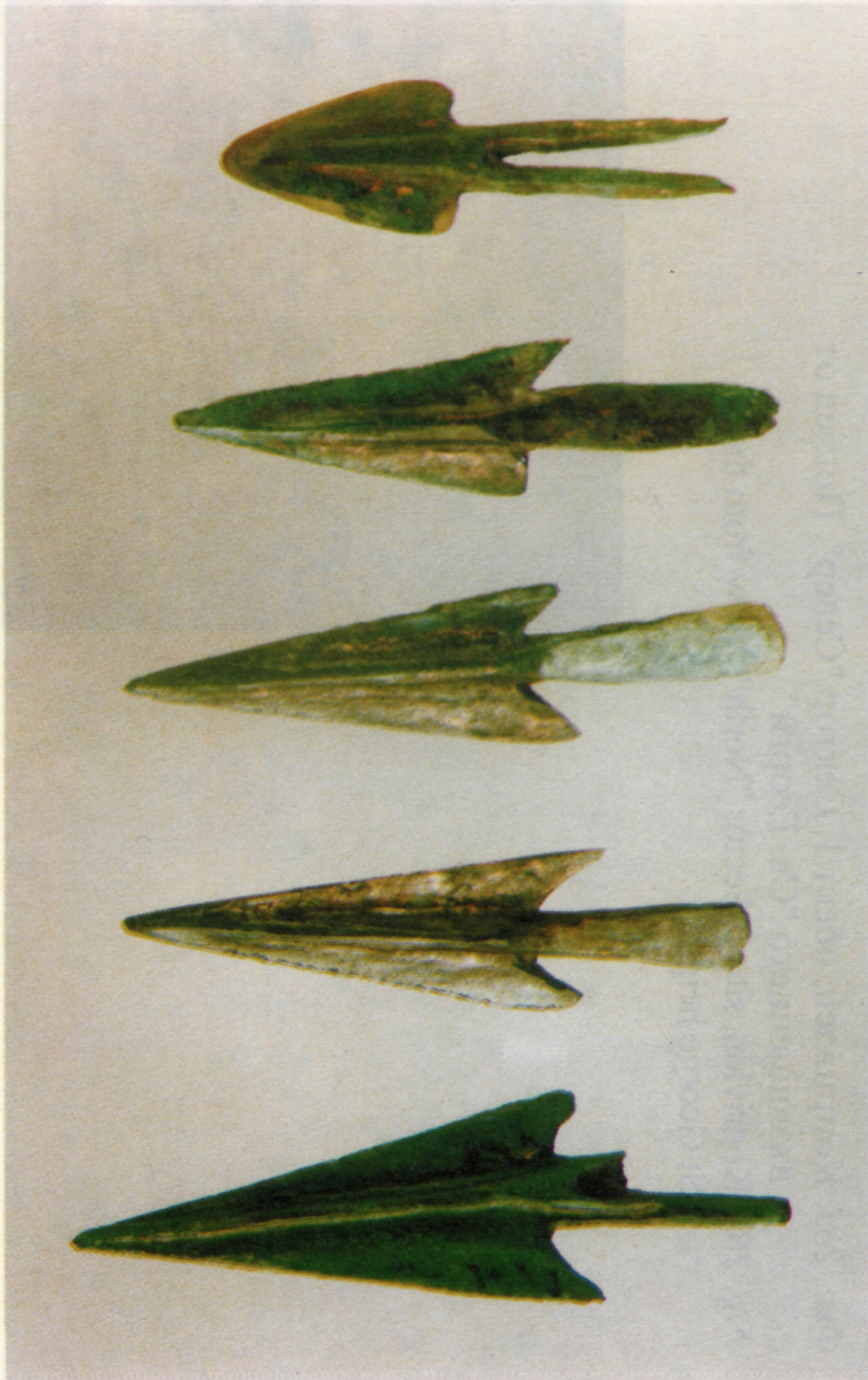
Фиг. 284. Копривлен, обект 1А. Селище от късната бронзова епоха. Поглед от възвишението "Св. Георги".

Fig. 284. Koprivlen, site 1A. Late Bronze Age settlement. View from the St George height.



Фиг. 285. Участък от стар път ("Калдаръма") югозападно от с. Копривлен.

Fig. 285. Remains of an ancient paved road ("Kaldaruma") south-west from Koprivlen.



Фиг. 286. Късна бронзова епоха,
бронзови върхове за стрели.
Fig. 286. Late Bronze Age bronze
arrowheads.



Фиг. 288.
Късна бронзова епоха,
керамика.
Fig. 288.
Late Bronze Age pottery.



Фиг. 287. Късна бронзова епоха, II хоризонт, кантарос от кв. 26.
Fig. 287. Late Bronze Age, IInd horizon, kantharos from Square 26.



Фиг. 289. Куха бронзова брaдвa. Сектор "Юг", яма S87.
Fig. 289. Socketed bronze axe. Sector "South", Pit S87.



Фиг. 290. Сондаж 4, кв. 1. Зид 3 с наносния пласт. Поглед от югоизток.
Fig. 290. Sondage 4, Square 1. Wall 3 with alluvial layer viewed from southeast.

Фиг. 291. Сондаж 1. Питоси и части от горели петна и мазилки.
Fig. 291. Sondage 1. Pithoi and layers with charcoal and plaster.



Фиг. 292. Фрагмент от чернофигурен съд.
Повърхностна находка.
Fig. 292. Fragment from a black-figured vessel.
Surface find.





Фиг. 293. Сондаж 4. Поглед от североизток.
Fig. 293. Sondage 4. View from north-east.



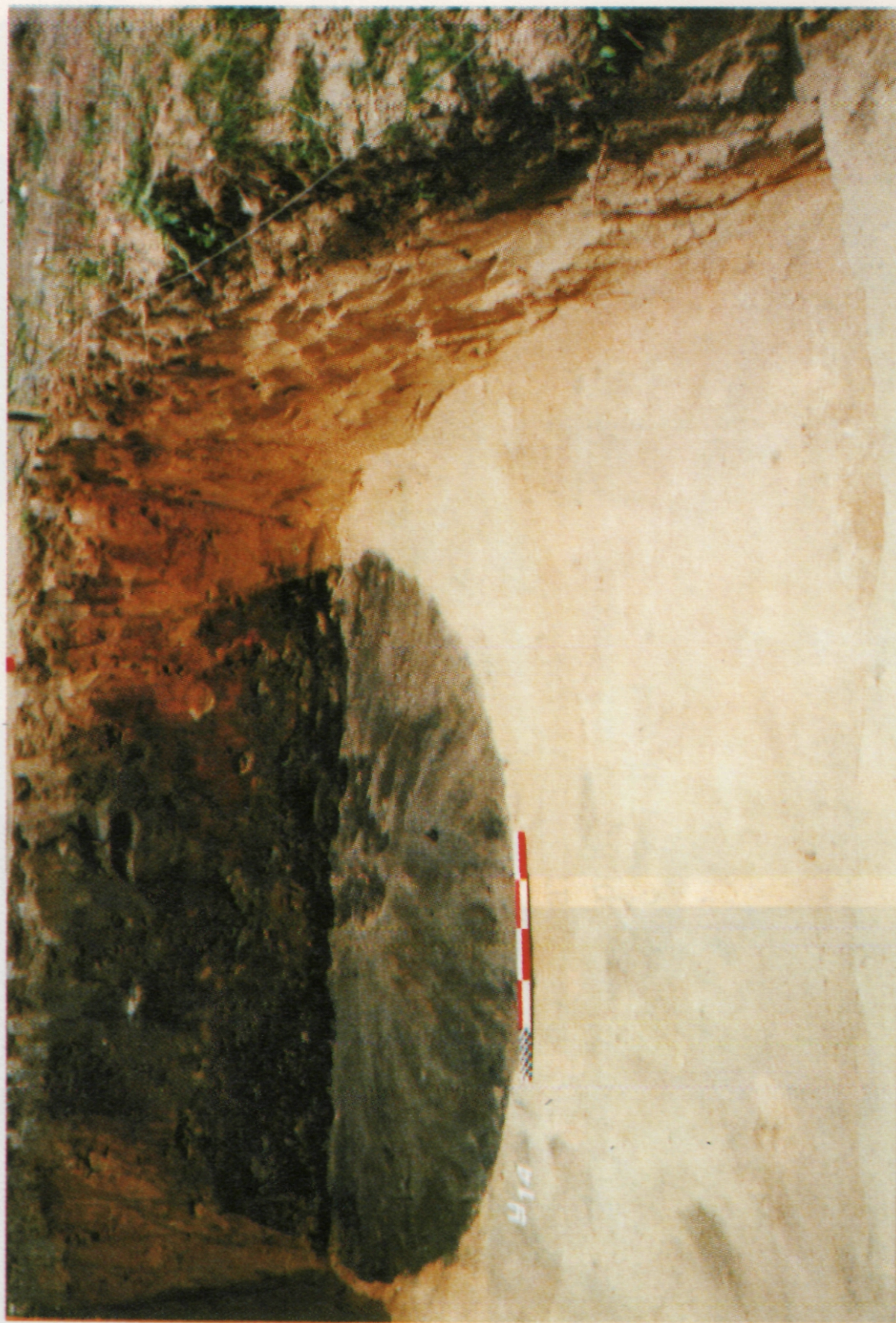
Фиг. 294. Сондаж 4. Поглед от изток.
Fig. 294. Sondage 4. View from east.



Фиг. 295. Сондаж 4, зид 2. В дясно: източния ъгъл на сграда В.
Fig. 295. Sondage 4, Wall 2. To the right: eastern corner of Building B.



Фиг. 296. Сектор "Юг". Общ изглед на сакралния комплекс.
Fig. 296. Sector "South". General view.



Фиг. 297. Северен сакрален комплекс, яма N1.
Fig. 297. Northern sacrificial complex, Pit N1.



Фиг. 298. Северен сакрален комплекс, ями N5a и N5b.
Fig. 298. Northern sacrificial complex, Pits N5a and N5b.

Фиг. 299.

Южен сакрален комплекс - ями и питоси в процес на проучване.

Fig. 299.

Southern sacrificial complex - excavation of pits and pithoi.



Фиг. 302.

Кана с изрязано устие от яма N14.

Fig. 302.

Jug with cutaway mouth from Pit N14.



Фиг. 300. Глинена купа с графитно покритие от яма S43.

Fig. 300. Bowl with graphite covering from Pit S43.



Фиг. 301. Глинена чаша от кв. 39-Т-II-x-5.

Fig. 301. Cup from Square 39-T-II-x-5.



Фиг. 303.
Кана от яма N14.
Fig. 303.
Undecorated jug from Pit N14.



Фиг. 304. Скифос с червена ангоба от яма N14.
Fig. 304. Skyphos with red slip from Pit N14.



Фиг. 305. Бронзови апликации и гривни - инвентар на гроб S1
в квадрат 39-Т-II-w-4.
Fig. 305. Bronze appliques and bracelets - grave goods from Grave S1
in Square 39-T-II-w-4.



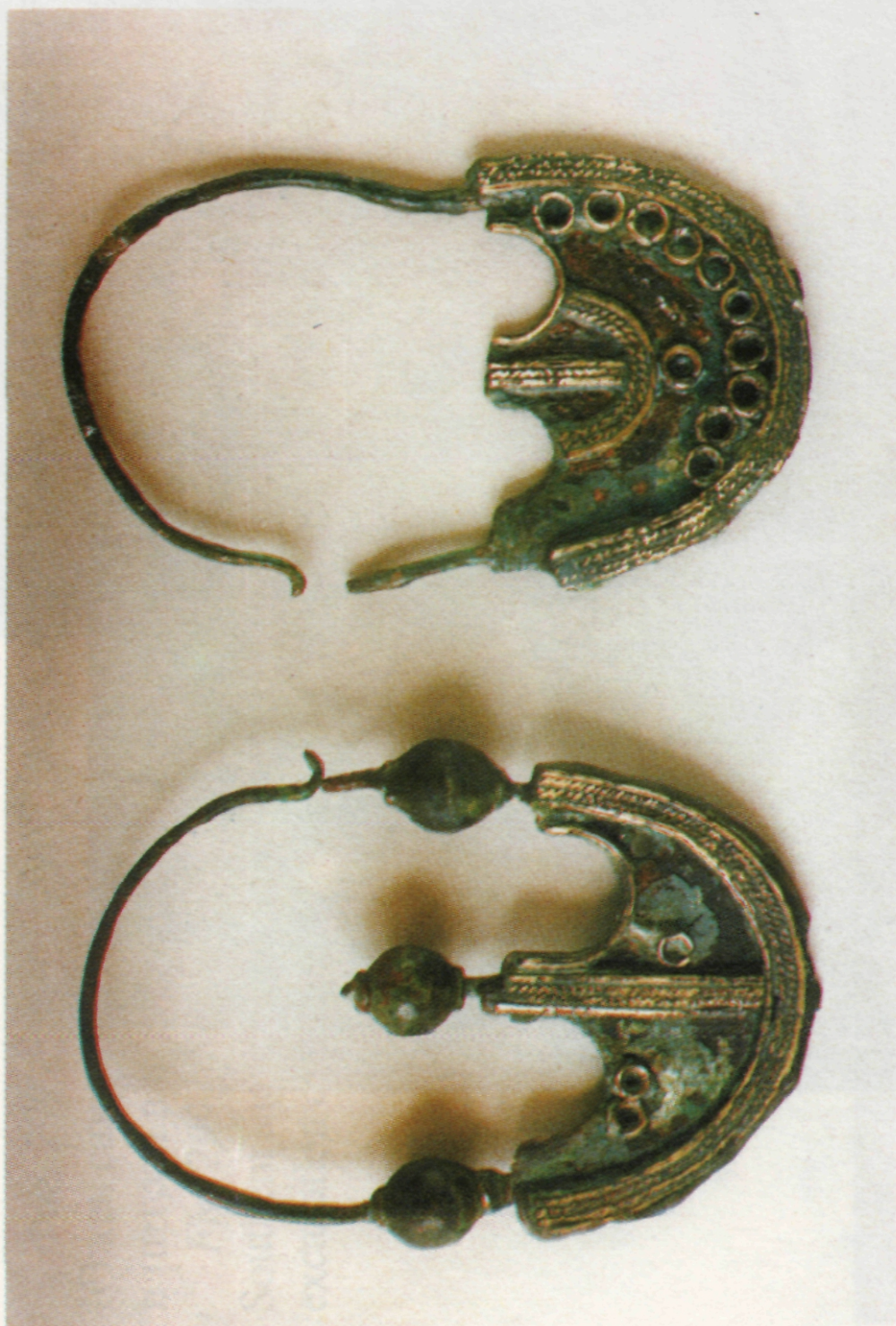
Фиг. 306. Сребърна фибула, сектор "Юг", яма S69.
Fig. 306. Silver fibula, Sector "South", Pit S69.



Фиг. 309.
Наниз от пъстроцветни мъниста
от гроб в сектор "Север".
Fig. 309.
String of coloured beads from
a grave in Sector "North".



Фиг. 310. Наниз от пъстроцветни мъниста от гроб в сектор "Север".
Fig. 310. String of coloured beads from a grave in Sector "North".



Фиг. 307. Бронзови обеци, гроб N90.
Fig. 307. Bronze earrings, Grave N90.



Фиг. 308. Сребърни обеци, гроб N55.
Fig. 308. Silver earrings, Grave N55.

ISBN 954-90387-7-7